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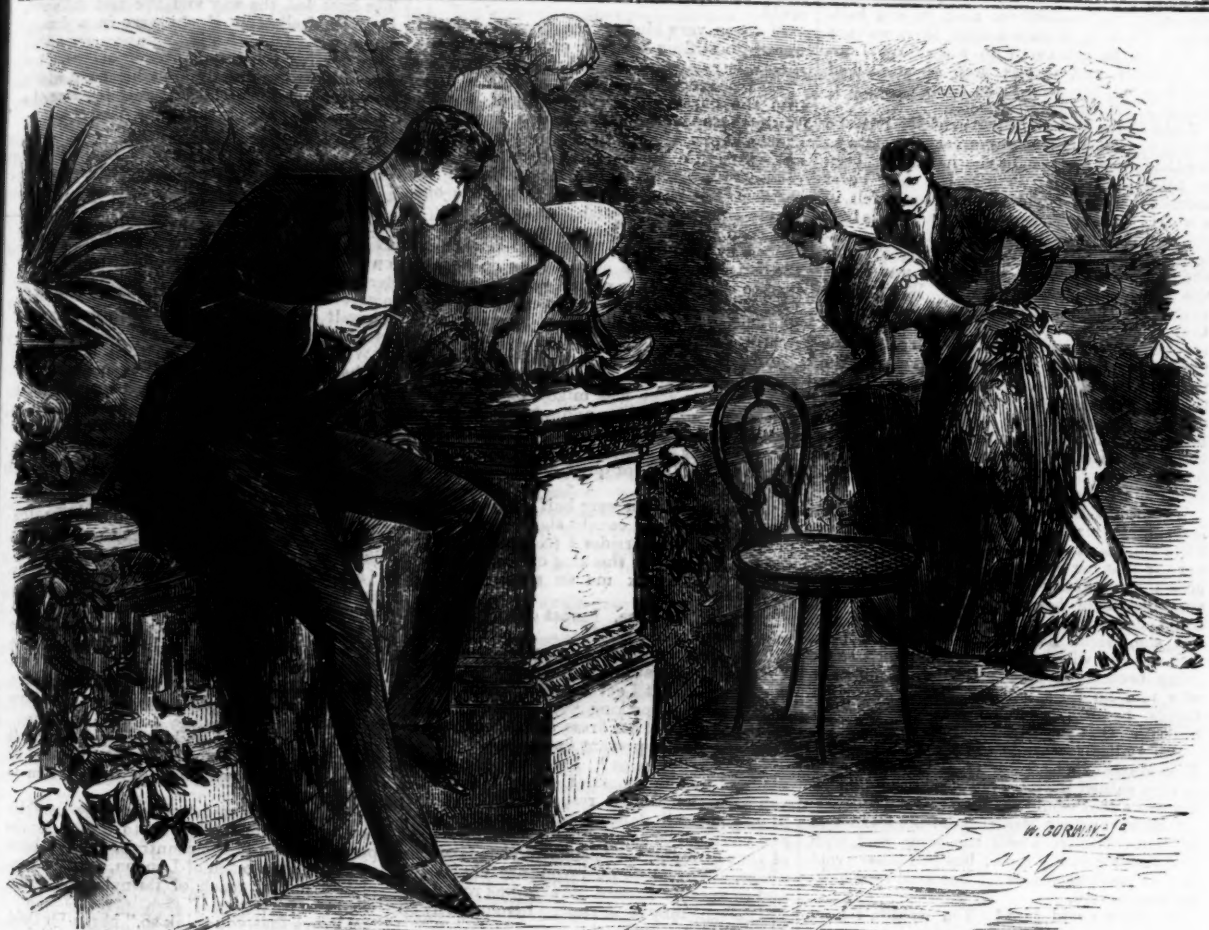
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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[A LONELY WATCHER.]

MORE THAN A BROTHER.

CHAPTER XIX.

"My dear child, everybody is waiting for you!" said Miss Mackenzie, in the sternest accent she could manage.

For the last five minutes the little spinster had been fuming with vexation lest her darling should incur Lady Paget's severe displeasure; but when she saw her ushered in by "that monster of wickedness," Lord Moor-town, anger and dismay took possession of her.

She had scarcely presence of mind sufficient to take the arm which a General Armstrong was offering her, and walk with him into the dining-room; and when a plate of mock-turtle was placed in front of her, she stared at it with eyes that saw nothing, and forgot to eat it.

The General said, with a smile,—

"Have you a rooted objection to soup?"

"No, indeed!" she replied, and caught up

her spoon with a startled air, just as her plate was whisked away by an officious waiter.

"Shall I call the fellow back?" asked the General, with a twinkle of amusement in his eyes.

"Not for anything; but he shall not have another chance with the fish!"

"My mind would have to be desperately occupied to make me forget my dinner!" looking at her with some curiosity.

"My thoughts were occupied with my niece."

"You could not have had a more charming subject for them! And I fancy I'm not alone in that opinion," with a significant glance at the Earl.

Miss Mackenzie drew up her thin figure, and tried to look quite formidable.

"Lord Moortown is an old acquaintance—nothing more!"

"It won't be his fault if he is nothing more much longer!" said the irrepressible General.

"It won't be mine if I can't prevent it!" she replied, already hoarse with excitement, as she fancied her pure-hearted, innocent niece

linked to a man whom she imagined to be ten times worse than he was.

"That sounds most terribly hard-hearted!" putting up his eyeglass and quietly surveying the couple, whose chairs had been placed next to each other by Sir Oriel's clever management, though Beatrice had been taken in to dinner by Raymond Lovell.

And what of Raymond Lovell? When he saw Lady Gerda come into the room with a face as cold and calm as a statue, his heart had given one great bound and then stood still.

He went across the room and shook hands with her, and no one noticed how white his cheeks had turned, or how hoarse his voice was as he uttered a few commonplacees.

Lady Gerda's voice was clear and musical, and to all outward appearance she was as indifferent to the young barrister as she was to most people; only Lord Fitzmaur, watching her with gravest anxiety, was conscious what an effort that control was to her, as she sank into a seat with a breathless sigh.

"Poor old girl! it's desperately hard for her, but Lovell's entirely out of the running!"



he said to himself, with that quantum of compassion we give to others' troubles—a very different amount to that which we bestow on our own. "I wish the fellow would have an attack of small-pox to spoil his beauty. She wouldn't care for him a straw if he only had such an ugly phiz as mine!"

Perhaps it was true, for mere beauty of feature has a powerful influence on a woman's heart; but even if it were so, there was small chance of Lady Gerda's being cured of her attachment, for the man she loved was generally the handsomest man in any ball-room. Looking down the table, there was not a face to be compared to his except Lord Moortown's, and it had been often said of him that half his good looks would vanish if he lost his splendid moustaches.

Lady Gerda was suffering acutely, but she would not show it. She was very gracious to Sir Oriol, and he thought she had never been so utterly charming before, but her heart seemed turned to stone, and her brain felt in a whirl. Oh! those two thousand pounds! If she could only recall them, how free and unfettered she might have felt to-night! For the first time for many years she was under the same roof as her lover! When they parted for the night, she would know that they would meet again on the morrow and for several morrows after that. There was no mother to tell her that she must keep the tiresome young man at a distance, no father to look stern when they happened to be dancing together. She might have enjoyed herself to her heart's content, sent control to the winds, and let herself go—if it had not been for her own madness. Oh! was folly ever more severely punished!

There was Beatrice, dying of love for that inscrutable man, Lord Moortown, with her little aunt always at her elbow to whisper in her ear that her chances of Heaven would be gone if she married him. Cora, under the surveillance of her aunt, Lady Paget, and could do nothing wild without a scolding; but she, Gerda Stanton, would have been free as air, with no one but her own easy-going brother to look after her—a brother who told no tales, and allowed her to do odd things, because he was not averse to them himself. Oh! it was maddening!

She smiled scornfully to herself as she saw Miss Macenzie lead her niece aside, as soon as they gained the drawing-room, and fancied the scene that would ensue.

"Now, my dear Beatrice, let me warn you in time. You are under the same roof with that terrible young man; but you must avoid him as much as you can," her kind eyes looking very severe.

"I can't avoid him! You wouldn't have me shut myself up in my room, or say to Lady Paget 'Your guests are not good enough for me!'" remonstrated Beatrice, her cheeks flushing.

"Now, don't be so perverse. You know what I mean. I am sure when I was young," drawing herself up, "I always knew how to keep young men at a distance. Just remember, child! that your soul is more to you than anything else, and would you give it into the hands of a man who would think no more of it than of a bag of sugar-plums?"

"I don't know that he is so very bad, after all," her pretty lips trembling. "And now that he is here I can't help it. I can't out him dead, or there would be a fuss."

"Of course not; but you must show him plainly that you do not care for him, or else, at the risk of offending my kind friends here I shall have to take you home. There now, child, don't make yourself unhappy about him. An unprincipled man is not worth a thought."

The tears were standing in Beatrice's eyes as her aunt moved away, in answer to a remark from Lady Paget, and she felt as if she could not face the inquiring eyes of the others, until she had recovered herself.

For a long while she remained in her nook hidden by the curtain, struggling bravely, like

a little heroine, with the one great grief of her life. She knew that her aunt was right to a certain extent. Beatrice Ashley had been brought up rather strictly, and was accustomed to think that pleasure was not the object of existence. She did not approve of dinner-parties on Sunday, but she liked to go to church twice, and think of better things. Not that she carried her ideas so far as to think it wrong to see her friends on Sunday when they dropped in for five o'clock tea, or refused to entertain them as cheerfully as she could.

She was very kind to the poor, and often went into stifling alleys in order to find out their misery, and relieve it if possible; and her sweet face seemed to bring sunshine with it into the darkest and dreariest of homes. With those views and pursuits how could she be happy with a man who was said to spend his life in hurrying from one race-course to another, and his Sundays in all sorts of festivities? Would they have one idea in common—one wish, one hope?

A deep sigh broke from her lips, and was echoed by another. In her deep thought she had not noticed a snattering step on the terrace, which came nearer and nearer, till Lord Moortown himself stood close by her side. She wished herself miles away, but was unable to stir.

"At last I've found you, Miss Ashley!" said the voice which always sent her pulses leaping. "Anyone else might have thought you were unobtainable, and come here to hide; but I know that you chose this spot because it was exactly suited for *me* to find it!"

"Indeed! You are quite mistaken," blushing furiously.

"I wonder if you were half as glad to see me as I was when I caught sight of a pretty pink dress in the corridor? (No answer.) Do you know I've been thinking of you so much lately? You think me an awful sinner, I know?"

"Oh, don't ask me, I must go to my aunt!" in great agitation.

"On the contrary, you must stay here. Your admirable aunt can have you any hour of the day, whilst I get only a few crumbs of your society in one long year," pinning down a small portion of her dress, as he leant against the wall, so as to prevent her escape. "Shall it be pax between us? I will call you 'Miss Ashley' in the properest way. I will treat you with the utmost respect; but, my darling, you shall dance with me every night, and you shall be as kind to me as if I were one of your respectable friends in your favourite alleys. Why, little one, you are shaking!" and in another instant his arm was round her waist, her sunny head resting involuntarily on his shoulder.

He looked down into the sweet face so dangerously near his own, and thought of the time when he had lifted her in his arms when thrown from her horse, and when all the rest of the hunt-streamed by—heedless, except for a careless shout of inquiry—carried her to where she could be properly cared for! Ever since that day she had seemed to belong to him; and firmly-rooted in his heart was the conviction that one day she would be his wife. Would it be very wrong? he thought, as he stooped his head; but there were steps on the terrace, and she started away from him in breathless haste, her cheeks as crimson as a kingfisher's breast.

Lady Gerda stood outside in the moonlight, with Sir Oriol on one side of her and Raymond Lovell on the other. She had had no time for private speech with the latter, and she had consequently been much puzzled by his conduct. Surely, she had been frank enough in that last interview? He must guess the purpose of her visit to Wray—he must remember the promise he had made to keep out of her way, and give her a chance of forgetting! Yet here he was by her side, and the look of misery which had haunted her had gone out of his face. What was the meaning of it? Had he come into a fortune?

"The music has begun—the floor is waiting. Don't any of you feel inclined to dance?" queried Sir Oriol, looking from one to the other.

"I have already secured my partner," responded Lord Moortown, promptly, with a glance at Beatrice Ashley, who shook her head with a smile.

"Raymond, you must go into the drawing-room and find yours. Lucky that we called our neighbours in! Lady Gerda, shall we show them a good example by beginning?" The host led the way and the rest followed, Beatrice feeling as if she were in a dream. She made a feint of slipping away when they were passing the drawing-room windows, but Lord Moortown quietly drew her hand within his arm, and she yielded at once for fear of a fuss—and perhaps because she liked it!

CHAPTER XX.

The first dance was over, and everyone went out on the terrace for a breath of fresh air. Lord Fitzmaur, looking very disconsolate, sat on the stone balustrade which separated the terrace from the grassy slopes, smoking a cigarette all by himself. He would not make himself agreeable or dance, because the one girl he wanted was missing.

With sudden eyes he watched the stream of happy, chattering, smiling couples, and thought how little it took to make some people ridiculously happy. He was in a jaundiced state of mind, ready to abuse anything and anybody, and the remembrance of his debts pursued him like a nightmare. There was nothing but the death of his father which could relieve him, and he did not like to count on that, and besides, the Marquis was as hale and hearty as ever, and likely to live fifteen or a score of years longer.

A girl's figure stepped out of a window, lit up by a stream of light, and stood just in front of the spot where Lady Gerda was leaning gracefully over the balustrade with Sir Oriol by her side. The light shone on a white dress and a small dusky head, which Lord Fitzmaur recognized at a glance; and with a quick drawn breath of pleasure he rose from his seat.

Lady Gerda was talking in her soft slow voice, and the words were heard distinctly by Cora, who was waiting for her cousin to find her out.

"Often in the midst of those gaieties which you think I am so devoted to, I sigh for the peace and rest of the country. Such a home as this within reach of London, and yet completely out of reach of its noise and bustle, would be perfection!"

"Prove that you think so," began Sir Oriol, in a tone that showed he was strangely in earnest.

"There is a very convenient train which brings you down in time for luncheon, and another which would take you home just in time for dinner!" broke in Cora, in the most matter-of-fact tone.

"Oh! there you are, Cor!" cried Sir Oriol, joyously. "We have been wanting you desperately!"

Lady Gerda turned round, and held out the tips of her fingers. She was not aware that she had been wanting Miss Paget, but she knew that she was intensely annoyed at being interrupted in her *tête-à-tête*, just as she was bringing the Baronet into the right frame of mind.

"I hope it is not for my sake that you have ventured to come down," she said, with cold politeness. "I should be so sorry to retard your recovery!"

"Don't be uneasy about that, I beg of you, Lady Gerda!" her small head very erect. "I promised Oriol that I would for my aunt's sake—and I always keep my promises."

"So glad to hear it, Miss Paget, for I have to remind you of one," said Lord Fitzmaur eagerly, as he shook hands as lingeringly as he dared.

Sir Oriel looked round quickly, as he was returning to the dancing-room with Lady Gerda, whose brows were drawn together in an ominous frown.

"It must have been a promise of long standing," he said, hastily.

"It only exists in Lord Fitzmaur's imagination," said Cora scornfully. "I have not met him for ages."

"It has seemed an age to me," replied Lord Fitzmaur; but he said no more about the promise, reserving it for a more convenient occasion.

"Cora, is that you?" asked Lady Paget, as they passed by the drawing-room windows. "I did not know that you had come down! Come in directly. My dear child, how imprudent of you to go into the night-air! You will catch your death of cold!"

"The night air never does me any harm, auntie. Can I be of any use to you? Is there anyone you want taken off your hands?" looking round from guest to guest, and exchanging bows and smiles. Many people gathered round her, to congratulate her on her recovery, whilst Lord Fitzmaur fretted and fumed, longing to get her all to himself.

"You won't refuse me a dance?" he asked as soon as he could, in a judiciously modulated voice.

"I could not dance to save my life!" she replied.

"Then let me find you a seat?"

"Not here—it is too dull. I want to see who is everybody's favourite partner: Go and dance. It will amuse me to watch you!"

"Thanks, I have a headache?"

"A very sudden one, I fancy. I despise them."

"Am I a sham?" in a gloomy tone. "I know I despise myself."

She gave him a quick glance of surprise.

"Are you a sham? I shouldn't have thought so. You never pretend to be as good as other people. You never try to hide your virtues. And if you have any virtues you don't trumpet them abroad."

"If I have any virtues!" bitterly. "I must say you are very flattering!"

"Am I?" carelessly, as she sat down on a small ottoman—one of the few seats which had been left in the dancing-room—and let her eyes roam over the various couples which were revelling to the tune of one of Godfrey's prettiest waltzes. "I know so little of you that I can't be expected to guess all the details of your character!"

"No, you never cared to study me!"

"Oriel dances much better than he used to," watching him intently, and perfectly heedless of the man at her side. "But Lady Gerda is too tall for him. Don't you think so?"

"I don't think about it!" roughly. "Why should I be staring at them? They are not looking at us!"

"Oh, but they are occupied! And now," with a tone of regret; "they are going into the garden!"

Her eyes followed them to the window, but her legs felt so weak that she was obliged to sit still and let them pass out of sight. Her thoughts wandered on to the terrace, after the man she loved and the woman whom she began to hate so fiercely. What were they saying to each other? she wondered, with ever increasing anxiety, and forgot to answer Lord Fitzmaur in her great uneasiness.

He relaxed into sullen silence, but she failed to notice it, which was another offence. She did not care about having him any longer by her side, now there was no object to be gained by the outward appearance of a flirtation, so she took it very quietly, when he rose from the seat which he had possessed himself of so eagerly.

"You find it dull now the room is empty?" she said, coolly. "Don't let me detain you. I am tired, and don't want to move."

"The room is not empty so long as you are in it," he answered, almost fiercely; "but you have given me the strongest hint that I'm not wanted!"

"What do you mean?" looking at his dark face with wide-open eyes, and perfect unconsciousness of her last offence.

"You won't think of me. You won't treat me with common courtesy. You don't even answer when I speak to you!"

"Don't you think there is some excuse for me?" her tone very gentle. "You know this is my first appearance downstairs, and the mere sight of a few people dancing bewilders me."

"I know—I know!" hurriedly. "Oh, Miss Paget, if you only knew how I've longed to see you! You remember that night on the Embankment? How I longed to pitch your cousin into the river!"

"If you had I should have followed him," the colour rushing into her white cheeks; "but don't talk of it. I was mad that night, and what you must have thought of me I'm afraid to think."

"I was so intensely thankful to have found you. Oh, why did you hesitate to come with me?"

"Lord Fitzmaur, I can't talk of it! I ought not to have hesitated. I ought to have refused point-blank!"

What he would have answered, as he slipped once more into the vacant seat beside her, Cora never knew, for at that moment Sir Oriel stepped in through the window, and hurried up to her.

"See what I've found!" he cried. "Poor little fellow, I believe he's half dead!" He held out his hands with something in them which the Earl could not see, but which Cora caught up with a cry of delight.

"My beauty, my poor little beauty! So you've come back to me, have you!" holding the little bird close to her loving heart. "Oh, bless you, a thousand times, for having found him!" casting one hasty upward glance of glowing gratitude into her cousin's face. "But it is ill, I'm sure it is." Oh, Oriel! it mustn't die!"

"I'm afraid it's all up with the little beggar," his tone full of sympathy, whilst Lady Gerda watched the scene from the open window, with a scornful curl of her lip; and Lord Fitzmaur, who had risen, leant against the wall with folded arms, with an expression that seemed to say, "What an absurd fuss about a canary!"

The two cousins were utterly oblivious of all spectators, and Sir Oriel's face was as anxious as if he had been watching the death of a favourite puppy.

"Let me take it upstairs. I daresay he's hungry!"

"Too late!" she gasped, as there was a flutter of the dragged wings, which were never to move again.

Beauty had risked everything for freedom, and got nothing out of the effort—but death! Gone for him was the glory of the sunshine, the soft breaths of the air, the feasts of groundsel and hemp-seed, the lumps of sugar when he was "a very good boy," the thrill of joy with every returning spring! The golden head drooped, there was silence, deep silence, instead of a joyful song. One little flutter, one passing breath, and all was still!

Cora burst into tears, and bent her head over the small, shrunken body, her tears running down on the yellow feathers.

"Oh, it is always so! Everything that I love goes from me!"

"I don't, Cora," his bright face close to hers, Lady Gerda quite forgotten, as well as her brother. "You will have me always, sticking to you like a burr," his hand was on her shoulder, his tone, his eyes, as full of love as any brother's. "And you know if I give it you, you will like another bird fast enough. So let me take it and give it to someone. It shall have a funeral to-morrow, before anyone has come down to breakfast, and you and I will be chief mourners."

"Don't tell aunt," shaking her head, when he tried to take the bird from her. "But I'll slip away quietly to bed. Good-night, Oriel!" lifting her wet lashes to cast one

glance at him, as she rose from her seat. Then she went out of the room, and straight upstairs, the Baronet accompanying her through the hall to light her candle.

Meanwhile, Lord Fitzmaur and his sister paced up and down the terrace in the worst of tempers. The utter absorption of the cousins had offended them both in the highest degree, and made each feel hopeless of success. Lady Gerda considered that she had positive proof that Sir Oriel was in love with her cousin. Her brother could scarcely doubt that Cora was wholly devoted to Sir Oriel.

For a while neither spoke, but each contemplated the disagreeable future, and the collapse of all their plans, with something like despair. At last, when they had the terrace all to themselves, the others having gone in for the sake of the dancing, Lady Gerda spoke out.

"We may as well pack up our traps, and be gone," she said, sullenly. "There's no earthly use and very little pleasure in staying here."

"Is it as bad as that?"

"Judge for yourself. You know what you saw in that room. He would have kissed her if we hadn't been there. And out here he interrupted a most interesting conversation, and sprang over the balustrade like a madman, because he heard Miss Paget's bird give a faint chirrup! Fancy leaving me!" drawing herself up, "for the sake of a canary!"

"My dear Gerda, surely you can make him do what you like! It isn't like you to give in at once," said her brother, cheerfully, though his heart failed him.

"I never fought this sort of battle before," she said, in a low voice, "and it is intensely galling to my pride!"

Raymond Lovell came out of the drawing-room, and stood still, looking up and down, as if in search of some friend. Lady Gerda knew who the friend was, and heaved a quick sigh.

"For Heaven's sake don't begin another flirtation with him!" said Lord Fitzmaur, anxiously, "or Paget will throw up the whole job in disgust!"

"A flirtation with Raymond Lovell! What are you thinking of? Haven't we known each other since the year one?" and, walking slowly towards him, she stood still, as he hid, just where the lights from within the house shone the brightest on her exceeding fairness. Willingly, of malice aforethought, she made herself the bait to tempt him; and her brother turned away with a scornful shrug of his shoulders, saying to himself that it wasn't his business.

CHAPTER XXI.

The days passed away, one after the other—bright days, full of sunshine and laughter, music and gaiety; but the brightest sunshine casts the deepest shadow, the ringing laugh precedes a burst of tears; the melody of a waltz may alter into the sonorous tones of a funeral march, the noisiest gaiety may change and falter into the silence of sorrow.

Lady Paget and Miss Mackenzie chatted cheerfully together, and never saw the broodings of the storm. But the servants, those true prophets of evil, knew all about it, and sat up late at night in order to discuss it.

"She's a she-devil!" said Mary, in a moment of desperate frankness to Mrs. Stapley, when she was ironing one of Cora's evening dresses round the edge of the skirt in the housekeeper's room.

"Hush! hush! We must talk of the quality with some respect, though we don't approve of their ways," said the housekeeper, reprovingly, not but what she quite saw the appropriateness of the adjective to the Marchioness's daughter.

"I haven't a farthing's worth of respect for her!" replied Mary, as she put down the iron with a thump. "How could you expect it of me when I see that she's driving my young

lady wild, she is—let alone the master, and Mr. Raymond!"

"You never mean to say she's going in for Mr. Raymond too? Isn't Sir Oriel enough for her, indeed?" Mrs. Stapley inquired, with fine scorn. "Mary, you must be mad!"

"I'm not mad, but I doubt if she isn't. The amount of that composing stuff she takes at night is enough to turn her brain!"

"Ah! there's more harm done by that sort of thing than half the world knows. I believe it's responsible for many of the suicides we read of in the papers. But what's this about Mr. Lovell? It don't seem like him, to be wandering after the same lady as the master."

"It's all her fault, I'd lay a penny! but I saw the two together on the terrace, and if they weren't lovers they were acting the part first-rate!"

"Well, her ladyship's just a firebrand, and nothing less, and I'm grieved to the bottom of my heart that her shadow ever darkened the doors of the old Hall. We ought to thank the Lord for letting us be in a humble sphere!"

"But oh my! wouldn't I be a Countess if I could!"

"Then you are a very foolish girl, with no more sense than a baby! What would you do amongst a set of grand folk, with all of them laughing at your grammar?"

"But grammar and all that would have come naturally to me with the coronet! Shouldn't I feel happy in a dress like this?" holding up the delicate white tulle skirt.

"Not you! You would put a thousand worries on with it! Is Miss Cora happy, poor dear? She that used to sing as blithe as a lark about the house?"

"If she ain't she ought to be, for the Earl worships the ground she treads on. He's not as handsome as he might be, to be sure."

"Take them altogether I would rather have the master's face than any other. Not that he's right down handsome; but bless you, you needn't take two looks into his face to see you could trust him down to the ground! There's Miss Cora's bell, and you'll have to go, whether finished or not."

"Yes, so I must! Oh, wouldn't it be jolly if we were going to hear the wedding-bells of Miss Cora and the master?"

"Now, Mary, none of that nonsense, if you please," and Mrs. Stapley looked severe. "You know what I think of the matter, and least said soonest mended!"

Mary departed, with a knowing glance, and the housekeeper shook her head with an anxious sigh.

She loved Sir Oriel and Cora Paget as much as her own children, and watching them as she did day after day, she trembled for the future. She knew that she could do nothing to help them, but she committed them both to the care of One Above with fervent faith, and knew that whether in sorrow or joy all would be ordered for the best.

"Can I speak to you tonight in the library?" Lady Gerda asked, in an almost breathless whisper.

Lord Moortown was too well-bred to look the astonishment he felt, so he bowed, and said simply,—

"I shall be at your service at any time you like to name."

"Twelve o'clock! Don't forget," and she turned away quickly, with one of her most fascinating smiles thrown back at him over her shoulder.

The Earl smiled.

"My dear girl," he said, to himself, "you are perfect in feature and form, but I would rather have one word from Beatrice Ashley than a whole volume from you. I wonder what your little game is now!"

That evening, Beatrice, having taken herself the task severely, would scarcely speak to him. She sat down to the piano in the drawing-room, and played Mendelssohn's "Lieder ohne Worte" to her aunt and Lady Paget.

It delighted them, but angered her lover almost beyond bearing, and he resolved to pay her out. He refused to dance or play

billiards; but coming into the drawing-room he threw himself into an easy-chair close to the piano, and fixed his large eyes on the player. His face was conveniently hidden from the elders by an Indian screen, but as he leant back and sat perfectly still, they thought that, overtired with tennis during the earlier part of the day, he had actually fallen asleep.

Poor Beatrice, under the continued gaze of his reproachful eyes, grew so nervous that she could scarcely see the notes before her face. She played wrong chords, she turned over two pages at a time, and got into one difficulty after another, till at last her aunt, in a tone expressive of astonishment and vexation, suggested that she had better go and dance, for she had certainly forgotten how to play.

"I am so sorry, Lady Paget," she said, with tears in her eyes; "these *Lieder* seem to have gone out of my head, but I can play something else for you."

"My dear, I delight in your music!" said Lady Paget, kindly, "but to-night you are not in the tune for it, and I think it will do you all the good in the world to go and dance."

Beatrice, with a crestfallen air, rose from the music-stool, and in order not to pass Lord Moortown determined to go to the dancing-room by way of the terrace.

She stepped out on to the terrace and raised her sad face towards the stars with a sense of infinite yearning. When would the struggle be over, and her poor heart left in peace? There was a movement in the room behind her, which made her anxious to fly, but as she stepped forward she found that her dress was caught at the back in one of the creepers on the wall. She turned to detach it, but Lord Moortown's hand touched it before her own.

"Allow me!" he said, coldly, as he stepped out of the window.

The dress was released in a moment, and they stood side by side in the starlight.

"I hope you are satisfied?" he said, sternly. "You have made me miserable and yourself uncomfortable, and all for what? A heartless whim!"

"You are wrong," she said, in a low voice full of pain. "It was a fixed resolution, not a whim!"

"A fixed resolution! Then it is no use to discuss it!" his anger riding rampant over his love. "Let me take you to the dancing-room, where you can follow your aunt's suggestion."

She took his arm after a moment's hesitation, and they walked together to the first window of the third reception-room, which had been set apart for dancing.

The band had just struck up a waltz, and all were dancing, except a few men who were lounging in the doorways without partners.

To Beatrice's surprise Lord Moortown deposited her on an ottoman and walked away! She had been doubtful whether she could break her resolution and dance with him; but it was terribly mortifying not to be asked. Her cheeks burnt, her lips quivered, but just at that moment Alick Armstrong, the General's youngest son, walked quickly across the room, and begged her to take pity on him.

She rose mechanically, and danced as if in a dream, but her feet kept time with the music, and her partner was quite content. When they paused, she became conscious that Lord Moortown was dancing with Lady Gerda, Sir Oriel having been called away to speak to somebody.

She had objected to his following her into the drawing-room and not dancing when she was playing on the piano; but she objected still more strongly to his waltzing with anyone else in preference to herself.

For the rest of the evening, instead of being pleased at the success of her own manoeuvres—for Lord Moortown never seemed to glance in her direction—she was utterly miserable; and at last, overcome by her feelings, she retired to the library, where she sat down on one of the crimson velvet lounges near the window.

A sudden gust of wind blew the curtain in front of her, so that her poor little woe-begone figure was hidden completely from sight.

She was very tired, and very sad; the tears rolled down her white cheeks, and her small head sunk back on the cushions. She had tried so hard to do what was right; but it was difficult to struggle for ever, though her aunt told her that it was a struggle between Heaven and the world.

The world took the form of the man she loved; and though she would do no wild thing in her despair, like Cora Paget, she could break her heart in secret, while no one suspected it.

Often and often she listened to temptation, for a spirit either of good or evil kept whispering in her ear that she might turn the sinner from the wickedness of his ways, and lead his steps softly on the narrow road.

Doubting, fearing, and hoping, she was roused by the sudden appearance of the very man who was the centre of all her thoughts.

As the clock struck twelve he stepped into the room and passed her by without seeing her.

He looked round the large room, as if disappointed at not finding someone there.

"Just like a woman!" he muttered. "They don't know what punctuality means!" and taking up a *Globe* he threw himself down into one of the large arm-chairs on either side of the fireplace with an impatient sigh.

He had come to meet someone, that was evident, Beatrice thought, and her poor heart throbbed with surprise and indignation. She knew she ought to get up and go away, but she was chained there by the acutest curiosity.

The minutes passed slowly, and the only sound in the room was the rustling of the newspaper. Oh! how her heart yearned to him, as she studied his handsome face with loving but stolen glances. He had been faithful to her for so long, and she had given him no reward!

The door opened, and in walked Lady Gerda Staunton, with something in her hand that looked like a letter.

"I am afraid I've kept you waiting," she said, in her bell-like voice; and half choking with indignation, Beatrice rose from her seat and fled. Alas! she could have sworn to his truth!

(To be continued.)

VERA'S KINGDOM.

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CHAPTER VI.

AND Lady Vera improved—at least they said so. A faint tinge of colour came back to her cheeks; she went about her usual vocations, and no one, unless it was Mrs. Carlyon, noticed that the heart seemed to have gone out of her smile, the joyousness from her voice.

She wandered into the library one day and took up an Army List; she studied it carefully, and later on read the military intelligence in the *Gazette*. Then she knew the worst. Captain Dugdale, of the —th Regiment, had indeed sent in his papers, his resignation had been accepted, and he was on his way home.

Vera closed the page with a sigh.

The same evening she was sitting in her boudoir when the door opened gently, and Oscar came slowly in. One glance at his face, and she knew the errand on which he had come. Often before she had guessed his wishes and fancied them, now she did not trouble to stave off his proposal. Better anything than that the one man she loved should have the power to tell his cherished bride that she was wearing the willow for his sake.

Oscar Eastcourt was five-and-thirty. Perhaps he had exhausted the fire and passion of youth; perhaps he really had no heart for anything apart from his æsthetic doctrines. He knew that he must marry; his future

honours rendered it needful; a wife was incumbent on one, and she must be beautiful, graceful, and of high birth.

Vera fulfilled all these conditions; as for negatives she must not have a strong will, a decided fault, or, above all things, a mission of her own.

Vera had none of these. She loved the dull shades affected by the party to which Oscar belonged; she cared so little what she wore that she would doubtless submit to her husband's suggestions, and she tolerated, and even mildly admired, the peacock feathers and sunflowers which Oscar worshipped.

Her appearance, too, was quite in keeping with the new furniture of the prophet's house. Dress her in a limp silk of high-art green with a girdle of terra-cotta, unbind her hair and let it hang in ripples to her waist, and she would be an ideal queen for an æsthetic home.

Not being in love Oscar had no fears as to his answer. He never even dreamed that Lady Vera would decline the high position he offered her as prophetic of his sublime creed; he knew her father's heart was set on the watch. Among the host of men who thronged her footsteps he could discern no successful rival, and he felt almost as sure of marrying the Duke of Dornford's daughter as he did later on of inheriting his Grace's title and estates.

"I am very glad to find you alone," he began, rather loftily. "I have a subject of great importance to speak to you about, and I regret to say hitherto all my attempts to gain a *little à little* with you have failed."

Vera held in her hand a pure white lily. It seemed a fit emblem of herself.

Oscar decided that lilies rivalled sunflowers; and then, as she did not speak, he went on with his discourse.

"It must have struck you, Vera, that I spend a great deal of time with your father, as much, indeed, as I can spare from the Cause?"

He always spoke that last word with a peculiar emphasis. I feel sure that in his vocabulary it was always written with a capital C of truly imposing dimensions.

"I know you are with us a great deal," said Vera, calmly. "Father is glad to have you; he likes to see something of his future successor."

"It must seem a hard thing to you you cannot inherit the title and estates?"

"Indeed, it does not. I care nothing either for wealth or honours. I was quite happy when I had neither."

Yes, it had come to this. The Belgravian beauty, the Duke's idolized daughter, looked back with a vague regret to those days at Sandstone, which had seemed so quiet and dreary. She knew now that they had been happy—happy, just because they held no pain.

"You are too modest!" said Oscar, kindly. "Perhaps, though, you agree with me that there is something more precious far than the mere tinsel of a ducal coronet?"

"I do," said the girl, who would have held Hugh Dugdale's love of higher worth than the title of princess; "but I confess I did not know you held that opinion."

"You wrong me. I hold them as nothing so noble, so elevating as a mission!"

Vera shivered. She was just a little tired of the words Cause and Mission. What would she be when she spent her life with the man whose creed they were?

"To ennoble and elevate one the mission must be fulfilled," said Lady Vera, slowly. "I own I have never fulfilled mine; from my childhood I have been a dreamer."

"Because you had not found your rightful sphere, Vera. With your beauty, with your artistic tastes, nature fitted you to be the helpmeet of the champion of a great cause. I want you to come to me and help me in word and deed to fulfil my mission."

It was a strange wooing—no word of love on either side.

Vera thought of the last evening when she stood with Hugh by the waves of the great North Sea; and despite the summer sunshine,

she shivered once again as she contrasted Captain Dugdale and Oscar Eastcourt.

"Are you sure I could help you?"

"I am positive. You are peculiarly fitted for the task. Your birth will influence one class, your beauty another, your sweet modesty and grace a third. My wife must have a past as fair and pure as an unwritten page. She must have nothing to conceal, for like a royal lady she must stand in 'the firm light that beats upon a throne!' When the cause succeeds her name will be a household word, her memory will have undying fame. It is a noble destiny I have to offer, and I know I could not proffer it to one more worthy, more purer in word and deed, more single in heart and purpose, than my cousin Vera."

His cousin Vera half sighed. She felt herself chosen for the cause, not for its prophet; but if he did not mind that, why should she? Since no time could give her love, why should she not take the husband her father designed for her, and at least have one satisfaction in knowing she had pleased the parent who so fondly cherished her.

"I will do my best, Oscar," said the young heiress, after rather a long pause. "I don't feel any particular call to what you call your cause; but I daresay, with you to help me, I shall feel interested in it."

"Of course! And you will come to me soon, Vera. I have reached the meridian of life, dear. You will not make me wait too long for my happiness, will you?"

"You think it will be happiness?"

"I am sure of it. I am not a demonstrative man, Vera. I do not rush into the coarse raptures of the Philistines, but I am not a stoic, I assure you. Your beauty entrances my senses, and I feel sure that between your spirit and mine, the kindred touch, the electric fire of sympathy, burns brightly!"

Vera would have been very glad to feel equally sure of it, but she felt the step was taken, and hesitation useless. After all, she had done her cousin no wrong. He did not ask her if she loved him, he did not plead for her affection; he only wanted a fellow-worker, a sort of disciple to the cause of which he was such an ardent advocate.

"Are you pleased, father?" she asked the Duke when he held her in his arms, and wished her happiness.

"I am delighted! It was the wish of my heart that my child should bear the title which came too late for her mother. You will be the most beautiful duchess in England!"

"Don't speak of that!" said Vera, with a broken sob. "Darling, I can't bear it. I would rather never be anything but plain Miss Milton all my days than bear a title that must be purchased by losing you!"

He stroked her hair fondly.

"Oscar will make a good husband, little one. You must cure him of some of his absurd notions, and he will be all we could wish."

If the prophet could only have heard his future father-in-law's sentiments I fancy he would have been ready to break off the engagement on the spot.

"I should like to have visitors soon, Vera," went on the Duke. "You know this is the last summer I can count on having you for my *châtelaine*. July is nearly over; London will be emptying. Whom shall we invite?"

They made up a list between them. Vera did not know whether to be glad or sorry when her father mentioned the Delavals.

"Julia is such a pet of mine, and her husband is a good fellow, too! He's just back from Russia. It's a thousand pities, Vera, they have that sister always in their house."

"I don't like Miss Delaval."

"More do I. I fancy Charles and Julia would be only too relieved if she picked up a good husband. Perhaps one of our guests may take a fancy to her!"

Vera smiled. She had no talent for matchmaking. She wrote the notes of invitation and despatched them to the post, wishing just

a little she could follow some of them to their destination.

Although Mrs. Delaval had declared to Miss Milton she had two love affairs before she met her present husband, they must have been very mild ones, or of a very fleeting nature, for she was devoted to Charles Delaval, Q.C., and honestly believed him to be the most shining luminary of the day.

"Shall we go?" she asked him, when she put Lady Vera's note into his hand. "We have no engagement, and I like staying at the Towers awfully, only—"

"Only what, Jewel?"

"I had rather not tell you."

"Are you afraid of my becoming jealous of the Duke? I'll promise to keep the feeling to myself."

"No. You won't like to hear it, Charles, but Rosa isn't nice to Lady Vera."

There are some men who defend their own relations through thick and thin, in spite of knowing them to be disagreeable.

There are others (and oh! wives, blessed with husbands of this type, be thankful for small mercies!) who, if afflicted with a peculiarly exasperating sister or meddlesome mother, honestly acknowledge the misfortune, and do their best to guard their better-half from the trials attendant on such connections.

Charles Delaval belonged to the latter class.

"My dear child, Rosa couldn't live without being spiteful; and, really, Lady Vera is in such a secure position I don't think Miss Delaval's malice can hurt her. I think myself, Jewel, our fair Rosa is growing a little soured because she is still unchosen."

"I wish she wasn't."

His tone grew grave directly.

"Does she vex you, Jewel?"

"Awfully sometimes."

"You see, I don't know what to do with her. Money's not the difficulty. She has three hundred a-year of her own, but if she left us she would never go into good society, and her chances of settling well would be over."

"I don't want her to go," said Jewel, bravely; "but I don't want her to be spiteful to Lady Vera."

"How could she be?"

"I don't know."

"We'll risk it, I think, dear. I have a shrewd suspicion your cousin Hugh will relieve us of Rosa's company, now he is on his way home. She has always liked him."

Jewel started.

"He is engaged to be married!"

"He isn't."

Mrs. Delaval stared.

"He wrote and told me so."

"Nonsense!"

"I have the letter—no, I burnt it; but I remember the passage perfectly."

"How did it go?"

"You will, I am sure, congratulate me on my good fortune. I little thought when I took leave of you so abruptly, I should return so soon, and in such a novel character. You will, I know, wish Shirley and me all prosperity in our new relations."

"Jewel, you're a goose!"

"I am not!" said Mrs. Delaval, indignantly.

"That could mean nothing but that he was engaged to Shirley some one or other. I did think he might have told me her surname."

The Q.C. laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks. He seemed to think the matter great fun.

"Jewel, you are too innocent! It is the best joke I have heard for years!"

"I don't see it. Poor Hugh has as much right to marry as other people, and I think you are very rude to laugh at him!"

"I am not laughing at him!"

"What, then?"

"My dear child, you have made the most awful muddle of a very simple letter. Dugdale wrote to me about the same time, and, as I am not romantic, I didn't turn his phrases topsy-turvy to make them sound as if he had

a love affair on hand. I was content with the bare facts—aye, and pleased too!”

“Perhaps you will condescend to tell me what they are?” pouted Jewel.

“Certainly. Hugh Dugdale has an uncle of the name and title of Lord Shirley, resident at Shirley Priory. The old gentleman has just lost his only son, a most awful scapegrace, and Hugh is heir presumptive to the title and estates.”

Mrs. Delaval gasped.

“Are you sure?”

“Of course. The new character he speaks of is a man of fortune instead of a needy soldier, and his new relations with Shirley are those of adopted sons. As soon as ever the Earl got over the first shock of his son's death he telegraphed to Dugdale, telling him to return home and fill the place of his heir.”

“Oh!”

“You need not look so utterly miserable, Jewel! You planned a romance on very slender grounds; but it hasn't hurt anyone!”

“I'm afraid it has.”

“What do you mean?”

“Can you keep a secret, Charles?”

He laughed.

“That's a nice question to ask a barrister! Why, child, I have kept weightier secrets than any you have to tell me.”

“I must tell you. I should worry awfully if I didn't; and, Charles, you'll try and understand.”

“I don't think I am exceptionally dense, Jewel; so begin.”

“When Hugh went to India there was someone he liked and who liked him.”

“I dare say.”

“Do be serious!”

“I am. Do you mean liked or loved, Jewel! It's as well to be particular, and those two letters make a great deal of difference.”

“I don't know; if I did I shouldn't tell you this riddle.”

“Make it as short as you can!”

“If he had been rich I am sure he would have proposed to her; but he hasn't.”

“I know that, dear.”

“Well, he went away, and she got rich—ever so rich—and had heaps of lovers, and said ‘No’ to everyone, though Hugh had been gone over a year and a half, and she had never had even a line from him. Well, I met her, and it was when I had just got that miserable letter.”

“You shouldn't abuse Hugh's epistle.”

“I meant well, Charles. I thought it was such a pity she should go on thinking of him and he engaged to someone else, and I knew he (and his bride, as I thought) would soon be home. It seemed to me such a dreadful thing that she might meet him suddenly, with his wife on his arm, and so I told her.”

The Q.C. whistled.

“You meant well, child; but it's a pity.”

“You haven't heard the worst. Within a month she accepted someone else. Now you tell me Hugh is not engaged, don't you see the mischief I've done? Why, I may have broken all their hearts!”

“Hearts are not made of such brittle stuff, Jewel.”

“You don't help me a bit!”

“I'm going to. Hugh Dugdale would never be rejected by any woman who had once loved him. You must try and let him and your friend meet, and trust to Providence.”

“But the other one?”

“Well, she can't marry them both. Dear me, Jewel, one often hears of hearts being caught in the rebound. Since one of the gentlemen must needs be left forsaken, what a merciful dispensation of Providence it would be if the one who was rejected turned to our Rosa for consolation!”

“Wicked little Mrs. Delaval clapped her hands at the bare idea. Then she went to find her sister-in-law and tell her of the forthcoming visit to Dornford Towers.”

CHAPTER VII.

THE glad August days had come again, and Whitby looked its loveliest, the summer sunshine falling on the ruins of the old abbey, and gilding them with a strange, weird splendour.

The season was at its height, and the evening train had brought in quite a crowd of visitors, but among the throng was one figure who had not to seek for lodgings, or even depend upon the accommodation of the superior hotels—a tall, soldierly man, with a mourning band on his hat.

For him a brougham drawn by two dashing greys was waiting. At his approach porters and railway officials doffed their hats, for in those parts he was an important personage.

All Whitby knew that since the death of the young Viscount Lenross Captain Dugdale was the direct heir to the Earldom of Shirley.

There was no pride on the handsome face; rather a deep, grave gladness. He shook hands heartily both with coachman and footman.

“All well at the Priory, Saunders?”

“All well, sir.”

“How are my uncle and aunt?”

“Bravely, sir. The Earl and my lady have been quite themselves since they heard that you had landed.”

Hugh did not marvel at the news. He knew, none better, that his poor cousin's whole life had been one bitter grief to his parents. Hugh felt that even in their grief at losing their only son, they would rejoice that no child of his shameless wife could ever wear the coronet of the Shirleys.

“Hugh, welcome home!”

Aye, that was it! Henceforward the Priory was his home; the place where he should spend his life, and perhaps one day bring his bride.

He looked into his aunt's face, a great pity on his own, as he kissed her.

“This must be a sad day for you, Aunt Amy.”

She plucked nervously at the crepe frills of her satin gown.

“It is better as it is, my dear; poor Lenross owned it himself. He could not have borne to think of her reigning here.”

“She did not make him happy?”

“Happy! She made his life one long pain and weariness; but he is at rest now, and you are in his place.”

The Earl and Countess brightened visibly as the evening wore on. They had always loved their nephew; they were proud of Hugh as a brave soldier and an honest man. They felt that if no child of their own could reign at the Priory, they were glad to have an heir for whom they need not blush. Their poor boy had made a sad mistake, which blighted his whole life; they had never even seen the woman who bore his name; they need not think of her now, for her connection with Shirley was at an end.

“You must make this your home,” said the old lord, when he bade Hugh good-night; “and remember, lad, we have only you to think of. Bring home your wife when you like. So that she is a gentlewoman, pure and true, your aunt and I will cherish her as a daughter.”

Hugh's face flashed, despite his bronzed cheeks. He pressed his uncle's hand, and murmured a word of thanks. His mind was full of a fair girlish face, framed with masses of auburn hair. Once again he seemed to hear a sweet voice murmur, “for all time!”

Of course, the first day after his return, Lord Shirley claimed poor Dugdale as his companion. Hugh found himself forced to devote quite a week to the old man's society; then one day, when his uncle had to attend a magistrate's meeting, Hugh was free, and the identical dog-cart which had played such a part in Vera's story, he started for Whitby.

He could not bear to speak of what was next his heart. An intensely reserved man, he had never even mentioned the Stuarts to

Lady Shirley, lest she should think he took an unusual interest in them.

He drove over to Whitby, put up the dog-cart at the Royal, and went himself in the direction of Silver-street.

Nothing was altered. The two years of his absence had made no change apparently; the old brass plate was there, bright and polished as ever, with its familiar notice:

“Dr. Stuart.”

Only when he saw the old tokens did it dawn on him there might have been changes. Two years all but a fortnight had passed since he was in Whitby. He might have found strange chances had come to pass, and as he rang the bell Hugh breathed a sigh of relief that all looked just the same.

A neat maid came in answer.

“Is Mrs. Stuart at home?”

“No, sir.”

Hugh felt nonplussed. It was barely eleven o'clock. He decided hastily the doctor's wife ought to have been home at that early hour.

“I will go in and wait for her.”

The girl stared.

“Mrs. Stuart is in Germany, sir, along with the master. The doctor is taking a month's holiday this year, and spending it in the Black Forest, on account of Mrs. Anstruther being there. Mr. Brown is looking after the patients. He's a very nice young gentleman, sir, and he's in the surgery now, if you'd like me to call him.”

Hugh shook his head.

“It was Mrs. Stuart I wished to see. When will she be home from Germany?”

“In about four weeks, sir; they only left last Monday afternoon.”

Hugh regretted his delay, though, indeed, it had been no fault of his. Then a new thought struck him.

The housemaid seemed intelligent and civil. She might be able to help him.

“Have you been with Mrs. Stuart long?”

“Five years, sir,” much surprised at the question from one she deemed a stranger.

“Ah, then you would have seen her. Do you remember a Miss Milton, a great friend of Mrs. Stuart's daughter?”

“Miss Vera, sir,” and the girl's whole face brightened. “I'm not likely to forget her; she was too beautiful. Our Miss Dolly had a nice face enough, but Miss Milton always looked as if she had stepped out of a picture.”

“Can you tell me where she lives?”

“Her home is at Sandstone, sir—Sycamore Cottage; but I did hear she lived chiefly up in London.”

“In London?”

“She was very ill, sir, nigh on two years ago. I know she came to us in September, and it was nigh on Christmas when she went. My master was anxious about her, and the mistress and Miss Dolly nursed her nights and day. She was here nigh on three months in all. We all grew to love her dearly before she went.”

“Did she go to Sandstone?”

“I can't rightly say, sir. She has never been here since she went away.”

“Never once?”

“Never once.”

“Did your mistress quarrel with her?”

“Oh, no! Mrs. Stuart was in London in the spring, and I know she saw Miss Vera there, for she brought me back a little keepsake from her. She may be at Sandstone now for a little visit, or she may be still in London. I wouldn't take on me to say.”

Hugh thanked her, regained his dog-cart, and drove to Sandstone.

When a little maid showed him into the best parlour at Sycamore Cottage, he seemed to understand the dreariness of Vera's life there. His heart ached for the girl who so loved all things bright and beautiful, and yet had had to pass her days in such a home.

He had asked for Mr. Rutherford. Some memory of Vera's love for “Uncle Jacob” had made him think the minister would be more sympathetic than his wife.

He had not to wait long. Very soon a tall,

gaunt man came in with a kind, homely face, and a strange stoop of his shoulders, as though he found life a heavy burden, and could not stand upright beneath its load.

"I think there is some mistake," he said, gently. "Your name is quite strange to me, sir."

Hugh did not tell the pastor he was Lord Shirley's nephew and heir. He had an instinct his honours would not help him here; he only answered gravely,—

"I cannot doubt it, but yours is very familiar to me. Two years ago I used to walk to Sandstone very often. Mr. Rutherford, I know you will let me speak plainly. I love your niece, Vera Milton; and it is my one desire to find her, and ask her to be my wife. I loved her when we parted two years ago; but there were many obstacles between us. I was a soldier of fortune, with no private means; debts hung like a millstone round my neck. I had no chance of being able to keep a wife, and dear as she was to me, I could not ask Vera to wait on the hope of my circumstances changing."

Mr. Rutherford sighed.

"She had a sweet face, sir, our little Vera; many's the time I used to wish her safe in a good man's keeping. I like the look of you, Captain Dugdale; and if it rested with me you should speak to the child and learn her answer for yourself."

"But surely it does rest with you? You are her sole guardian?"

"I was her guardian for twenty years; then her father claimed her."

"Her father?"

"There was a strange misunderstanding, sir; there was a great gulf between our sister Primrose and her husband. He was rich and great, and we fancied he had meant to marry her. My wife never knew his real name and rank until he came here to claim Vera, and she, doubting her good father, preferred to bring up the little one as our own."

"How did Mr. Milton find her?"

"From a photograph. It seems he thought no one but his wife's child could so resemble her. He was very kind to us, thanked us over again for our care of Vera, and then he took her abroad."

"Can you tell me where she is?"

"With her father."

"I mean will you give me his address, and let me ask his consent to my wooing his child?"

The minister pondered.

"I passed my word the story should never get abroad. He is a proud man; and he could not bear that anyone should know his daughter had been reared in poverty."

"I will keep the secret if you trust it to me. Were the Stuarts at home I would go to them and spare your scruples."

"You really wish to marry Vera?"

"I wish it with my whole heart!"

The minister shook his head.

"Her father is a worldly man. He has taken her to every kind of gaiety; the child's heart will always be in the right place, I know, but I fear you will find her altered, sir. She is a great lady now instead of a little country girl. One of our congregation went to London a little while ago and said he saw her driving in the Park dressed like a princess."

Hugh smiled.

"I fear nothing, Mr. Rutherford, so that she is free. My love will win her from all rivals, and I think my prospects will satisfy her father."

"He is not an exacting man. He told me the child should marry who she would so that her husband came of gentle blood. You will like my brother-in-law very much, Captain Dugdale! True he is of the world, worldly, but his manners are charming."

Poor Hugh began to feel severe doubts of Mr. Milton's status; a stuck-up parvenu proud of his fortune would be an infinitely more disagreeable connection than the humble pastor of Sandstone.

"If you can give me his address, sir, I will lose no time in making his acquaintance."

"He is at Dornford Towers just now, and Vera with him. I fancy they intend to remain there several weeks."

"As the Duke's guest? I know Dornford very well, and if Mr. Milton and we are friends I will ask him to use his influence in my favour."

The pastor smiled.

"I must have told my story very badly, Captain Dugdale. I thought I had told you that Mr. Milton was Vera Milton Eastcourt, Duke of Dornford, and that our little girl is his only child and heiress, Lady Vera?"

Hugh gasped.

"An heiress?"

"That need make no difference to you. The Duke openly says he is not ambitious; so that his child is happy he will be content. If you already know him it is easy for you to present yourself at Dornford."

Captain Dugdale left at once and returned to the Priory. He found his aunt busy with one of those fashionable newspapers which profess to give the latest tidings of the upper ten thousand at home and abroad.

"Fancy, Ralph!" she was saying to her husband, as Hugh came in, "the Duke of Dornford will have the wish of his heart at last. Listen: We hear on good authority that a marriage is arranged between the Honourable Oscar Eastcourt, heir presumptive to the peerage of Dornford, and the Lady Vera Eastcourt, only child of the present Duke."

"Whew," said the Earl, quietly. "He's too old for her."

Neither of them noticed that their nephew had left the room.

Hugh felt just then he could not bear their friendly company; the blow was all too fresh and keen.

CHAPTER VIII.

DORNFORD TOWERS was gay that autumn. Guests responded gladly to the Duke's invitation, and the grand old mansion was cheerful with pretty women and brave men.

Among them all Lady Vera moved with faultless grace. She filled her post of *châtelaine* admirably, and everyone declared the Towers could not have had a fairer mistress; but one or two who, like kindly Mrs. Delaval, had sharp eyes and quick perception, fancied that, in spite of her brilliant prospects, the Duke's daughter was not happy.

She was often tired and languid; she seemed to have lost her high spirits, and she never willingly alluded to that ceremony to take place some time in early spring which, without changing her name, would make her a wife and matron.

Her conduct to her betrothed was perfect, simply perfect everyone said. She rode with Oscar, drove with him, made copies of the endless speeches he was always being called on to deliver at public meetings.

She studied the varieties of the sunflower, and even carried a huge bouquet of its yellow blossoms at an evening party. Her manner to her betrothed was kind, respectful, and submissive, never tender or loving. A bystander remarked once that their courting was like one of those wooings of olden time, which, being conducted by deputy, had every form and ceremony, but lacked all heart and feeling; perhaps, though, the speaker was wrong, for Oscar seemed perfectly contented, Lady Vera uttered no complaint, and so the days wore on.

The Delavals prolonged their visit more than once. The husband and wife were popular with all, and Rosa had lately developed an æsthetic mania, and become one of the Honourable Oscar's most ardent disciples; in all the time he could spare from his public duties (?) and from attentions to his fiancée, Oscar devoted himself to his newest proselyte—the two were the best of friends.

"You are not vexed?" said Lady Vera, gently to Mrs. Delaval one day when Rosa had

gone out walking in a terra-cotta waistless gown, a headgear adorned by peacock's feathers, and a general æsthetic appearance. "You know I never tried to convert her, but Oscar has inoculated her with his crotchets."

"Far from being vexed I am thankful Rosa has taken up a harmless hobby. Vera, one never minds what one says to you—one feels you can be trusted. Rosa is the one trouble of my life. If only she would marry Charley I should have nothing left to wish for."

"I wonder she does not. She is strikingly handsome and attractive."

"When she was young she looked too high; now at eight-and-twenty woeers are reluctant. The fact is, Rosa has an atrocious temper, and I fancy people are beginning to find it out."

"Oscar was quoting her the other day as an example of heavenly serenity."

"I wish he could hear the sentiments of her long-suffering maid. Seriously, Vera, are you sure you don't mind?"

"Mind what?" dreamily.

"My sister-in-law engrossing so much of Mr. Eastcourt's attention. Very few fiancées would like it, I fancy."

"But we are not like other people."

"You are not like anyone."

"When one promises to marry a man with a mission one doesn't expect him to be like other lovers. He belongs to the world at large."

"I should decidedly object to a lover who belonged to anyone but me."

"I rather like it."

"Vera!"

"You see Oscar gets petting, and tender speeches and all that from outsiders. He only comes to me for sympathy and practical matters, and those are all I am good for."

"Nonsense!"

"I couldn't have married a man who has always making love to me."

"Well, I have been married four years, and I assure you Charles makes love to me sometimes even now, and—and I like it."

Vera smiled.

"You are so young."

"Four-and-twenty, two years your senior."

"But I feel as old as Methuselah. You see, Julia, you have kept your heart young and fresh."

"Haven't you?"

Vera half sighed.

"I think sometimes I haven't got a heart at all. It feels all dead and cold."

"I hope it will keep so if you persist in marrying Oscar Eastcourt."

"Julia!"

"I can't help it. You know yourself you are not the least bit in love with him."

"I like him very much."

"Do you? I can't see much to like about him. He would do very well for Rosa. It is a thousand pities you did not leave him for her!"

"Is it?"

"Vera, I want to ask you something. Promise not to be angry?"

"Well."

"Why did you accept Mr. Eastcourt?"

"I don't know."

"You must know."

"I was so tired," said Vera, slowly, "and the future all looked so vague. I thought if I accepted my cousin I should at least be safe."

"Safe from what?"

"From offers of love I could not return, from speculations as to my future."

Julia suddenly stooped down and kissed her.

"My dear, my dear!" said the happy young wife, "you are making a great mistake. You are trying to live your life without love, and you will never do it. Vera, with your nature love is as necessary to you as the air you breathe."

Vera sighed.

"I can manage without it."

"You will wreck your life."

"We shall do very well. Oscar is not exact-

ing. The calm, consoling liking I can give will quite satisfy him."

"And what about yourself?"

"I would rather be without love—unless I could return it."

"Do you know my cousin Hugh has come home, Vera?"

Vera winced.

"Indeed! Have you met his bride?"

"He has no bride."

"His future bride."

"It was all a mistake, dear. He wrote demanding my congratulations on his good fortune, my good wishes for him in his new relations with Shirley, and I, like a goose, thought he was engaged, and Shirley his fiancée. Instead, it is the name of some estate or other that he is to inherit one day."

"The Priory," said Vera, dreamily. "Is he really to be master of that? Why, then, he will often see Sandstone. I wonder if the dear old place is much altered?"

"I thought you hated it?"

"So I did while I was there, but since I left it I have discovered that I love Sandstone with every fibre of my nature."

"Hugh loves Yorkshire too."

Vera never knew how she got out of the room. She felt she must be alone. She wanted to think over all the wonderful things she had heard.

Hugh was free, and lord of the lovely estate he had once described to her. Hugh was free! Oh, why had she been so hasty!

Even if he never crossed her path, if he never sought her with lover's vows, she need not have engaged herself to Oscar!

She would rather have been an old maid than the prophet's wife, rather far have led a lonely life than pass it at his side.

She had accepted him solely for fear Hugh's wife should guess her secret; and now Hugh's wife had never existed, save in her own imagination!

Meanwhile, Oscar and Miss Delaval were enjoying a delightful ramble. They had talked of the things dearest to their faith; had discovered their views; agreed in all things; that they had, as it were, but one heart beating in unison between them, when the prophet said, suddenly,—

"You must come and stay with us at our own place when we settle down. Then you will see my theories carried out to perfection."

Rosa blushed and lowered her eyes with maidenly confusion.

"You are very kind to wish it."

"And you will come?"

"I fear it is impossible."

"Why?"

"I cannot tell you."

"Lady Vera shall send you the invitation in all due form, and you must accept it."

"I cannot."

"But you must! Why not?"

"I would rather not tell you."

"But I mean to know."

"For your own sake do not ask."

His curiosity was fairly aroused.

"Miss Delaval, you are making mysteries. I insist upon knowing."

"Because under no circumstances could I be the guest of Lady Vera."

Oscar looked more and more bewildered.

"Aren't you her guest now?"

"No; I form a part of my brother's family, and his wife is responsible for where we go; besides, Mrs. Carlyon is the actual hostess."

"Miss Delaval," said Oscar, "you have said too much or too little. Either you think Lady Vera too young for a chaperon, which is ridiculous, since a child of seventeen can fill that function if only she has a wedding-ring on her finger, or else you are casting a slur on her character."

"I am not," said Rosa, eagerly. "I would not do so for worlds. She is charming, perfect; only poor me, who am just a mere nobody, cannot afford to put Mrs. Grandy at defiance, and Lady Vera has no regard for the consequences, so that in my position I could not be her

guest without some other matron to act as chaperon. She is very lovely, and I daresay will make you happy; only, Mr. Eastcourt, you are not as other men are. You are the prophet of a great cause; you have a noble mission to fulfil. For the sake of your work I could have wished you had chosen a bride upon whose name no taint of scandal could ever rest."

"None can rest on Vera's."

"Can there not?"

She looked at him steadily, and a strange fear rose in his heart that her words had some real foundation.

"Speak."

"Is it correct that a young girl should leave her home unknown to all her friends, and travel from Scarborough to London with a man who is no kin to her. Is it correct that there should be a blank page in your wife's life that she cannot account for it?"

"Prove it!"

"Ask her yourself whether she did not leave her home two years ago in a gentleman's company, and return the next day alone! She did nothing wrong; it was mere girlish imprudence, but such things are never forgotten. The wife of a man with a great work to perform should have no hidden secret in her life!"

Rosa Delaval spoke in the hope that Oscar's engagement would be broken off, and he turned to her for consolation. She was grievously disappointed.

That evening at dinner the Duke announced that his cousin had been called unexpectedly to London. Lady Vera was not present. Alone in her own boudoir she sat reading a pencilled note, a strange, new light shining in her eyes, for once again she possessed her freedom."

"MY DEAR VERA,—

"I know all about your nocturnal journey from Scarborough to London. I acquit you of all harm, but even girlish folly would cast a shadow on anyone who had to lead such a public life as the wife of a prophet. All we have spoken of in the last weeks must be given up. I return you your troth, and am leaving Dornford for the present. I don't consider you have treated me fairly; but I shall never tell anyone the true reason of our parting, but shall always ascribe our rupture to the half-heartedness of your devotion to the great cause.—I am, my dear Vera, your faithful kinsman and friend,

"OSCAR."

Vera had two visitors that morning; the first her father, who came to her with a troubled look on his handsome face.

"Eastcourt actually had the impertinence to tell me you were not sufficiently in love with æsthetic doctrines to please him. Why, I thought the express purpose of his marrying was to drive all such rubbish out of his head. I should liked to have knocked him down!"

"I'm glad you didn't; and father," drawing his head down to her, and kissing him, "do you know I was getting very tired of Oscar's theories and doctrines. I think a man without a mission would be a pleasant partner for life."

"Then you are not sorry?"

"I am unutterably relieved. I had thought for some time Oscar and I were unsuited, but I could not break it off myself, because I am an Eastcourt, and our word is our bond. But for your disappointment I should be quite happy."

"Vera, don't think of my disappointment. I had set my heart on your being a duchess, but after all I could never have seen you bear your honours. It is best as it is."

The other visitor was a very different person—bright, cheery Mrs. Delaval.

"Well! she said, meaningly, "what does this sudden departure mean? Have you come to your senses?"

"No, but my cousin has!"

"You mean—"

"He thinks me not sufficiently devoted to the cause, and therefore we had better part."

Mrs. Delaval clapped her hands.

"I admire the cause more than I ever did

before, since it has set you free. I will even wear sunflowers on my next ball dress! Do you know, Vera, I had fancied it was something else?"

"What?"

"I am afraid to tell you."

"I can guess. Julia, I can trust you. That is the real reason of our parting, only the other one will do for my father and the world at large."

"Then my sister-in-law is a traitress. Rosa is not above eavesdropping or tale-bearing. I have felt she knew the history of that night, only I thought it was impossible."

"I wonder why she hates me so?"

"It was not hatred for you actuated her wild desire to become a duchess. I believe she thinks Oscar will turn to her for consolation."

But he did not. Very soon the papers announced the arrival of the Honourable Oscar Eastcourt in London, whence it was stated he meant to start on a tour through Italy.

Miss Delaval was in despair, but I don't think anyone particularly pitied her. She went home with her brother and his wife, and a great calm fell over the Towers.

In those days a little note came from Dorothy Anstruther, begging her old friend to come and stay at Whitby. She was in Silver-street for a month, and it would be just like old times if they but could be together.

Vera doubted, hesitated, and finally started for Yorkshire.

"I never was so glad of anything as when I heard your engagement was broken off," said pretty Mrs. Anstruther the day after Vera's arrival. "I heard Mr. Eastcourt lecture once, and I hated him."

"It was a mistake."

"And shan't you ever marry anyone?" asked Dolly, who had expected a little confidence, and imagined a tale of a successful rival to the Honourable Oscar.

"I don't think so."

"Vera," said Mrs. Stuart, gently, "you would rather go alone to Sandstone, wouldn't you? The doctor wants to drive you, but I told him I was sure you would rather walk in, and take them by surprise."

"Much rather, dear Mrs. Stuart!"

But though she set off in good time, Vera loitered on the road. The old familiar path was full of strange, sweet memories, and when at last she reached the rocks where she had sat with Hugh the night before her unpremeditated trip to London, the tears stood in her eyes. Then, as now, it was low tide, and the tall gaunt rocks lay dry and bare; then, as now, it was the sweetest and time of early autumn.

"It is all just the same," said the girl, in a voice she hardly recognized as her own. "Nothing is altered. I alone am changed."

"You are not changed," said a voice near her. "I should have known you anywhere!"

Hugh Dagdale stood at her side. So the two who had parted in Mrs. Delaval's drawing-room met again, the two who loved each other, and yet had never been acknowledged lovers.

"Then you have come back?"

"Yes; I came home joyously enough, but I soon found I had scant cause for gladness."

"Shirley—"

"Shirley will be mine some day," he answered, interrupting her quickly, "but what matters that when my heart's desire is denied me?"

She could not speak, only she raised her beautiful eyes to his face full of a wondrous love.

"And you are a great lady; the little girl I used to know is to be a duchess. Will you let me wish you happiness?"

"Wish me all the happiness you will, but I shall never be a duchess."

"I heard you were to marry your father's heir?"

"We were engaged six weeks."

"And you jilted him?"

"I think he jilted me. He told me we had better part at least."
 "And you were sorry?"
 "I never was more glad."
 "Whatever made you accept him?"
 "Father wished it, and I wanted to feel settled."
 "Then you tired of your old love of freedom?"
 "I don't know."
 "Mr. Eastcourt must be a strange man."
 "Why?"
 "Because holding your promise he set you free. Did he find out you did not believe in love?"
 "He did not want me to. No, he found out something else."
 "What was it?"
 "She looked into his eyes."
 "Only the story of a summer night two years ago. Only the tale of my first journey to London."
 "And that parted you?"
 "Yes. Don't be sorry; I was so glad. He was a man with a great cause, and I wearied of it so. The day after he was gone I had my sunflower in the house thrown away, and all the peacocks' feathers made into a great bundle. It was very childish, but oh! I had so wearied of them!"
 "And you are happy?"
 "Happy," ponderingly. "I don't know. Is anyone quite happy. Are you?"
 "I should be if I had one boon. Vera, I love you dearly. I will do what heart and life can to make you happy. When fortune came to me I hurried home hoping to find the lonely little girl I had left, and gild her life with the sunshine that had come to brighten mine. Alas! she had vanished. They told me that far away she had blossomed into a queen of fashion—a great lady."
 "She has not changed for you. She is Vera still, just as ever."
 "And what is Vera's answer? Can she love me still?"

One of his arms was round her now. They sat together on the rugged piece of rock, and the lonely beach seemed for them an earthly paradise.

"I think I loved you always, even from the first. Oh! Hugh, I have wanted you so badly."

"And I you. Then you will be my wife, sweetheart. You will give yourself to me?"

"Yes," she whispered, fondly, "because I know your love is for all time, and that your true, loyal heart is—'VERA'S KINGDOM.'"

[THE END.]

THE MYSTERIES OF FERNLEA.

—O—

CHAPTER VI.

A SURPRISE awaited Norman Anstruther when (for a wonder) he returned from his aimless wanderings in the Daventry woods in time for the early dinner he shared with Mr. Yorke. The artist was there truly; but instead of his loose velvet coat he was clad in an irreproachable suit of black, and instead of the room being littered with drawing materials, bearing witness to his morning's work, his portmanteau strapped in one corner of the parlour, and his easel, sketching umbrella, camp-stool, and other artistic paraphernalia were packed into as small a compass as their nature permitted, and reposed in another room *vis-à-vis* to the portmanteau.

"What on earth is the matter?" exclaimed Joan Daventry's lover. "It looks as though you were contemplating a speedy flitting!"

"I am going to London by the four o'clock train."

"But why? I thought you were settled here for months? What on earth has happened?"

"I am engaged to be married!"

Anstruther looked simply incredulous. He had known Ronald Yorke for years, and had looked on him as a confirmed bachelor. He knew a little of Mrs. Yorke's manoeuvres, and had wondered at her son's escape from such determined match-making. Surely that lady had never taken the law into her own hands, and, following the French custom, sought a wife for her son, since she despaired of his finding one for himself. He was simply bewildered.

Ronald smiled. He rather enjoyed the utter amazement on his friend's face.

"It is quite true," he said, gravely, "and I think I deserve your sympathy. After being persuaded by my mother for a dozen years it was my duty to marry—after being assured I deserve an heiress—I at last gain courage to propose to a young lady, and am ignominiously turned out of the door by her dear mamma."

"But you said you were engaged?"

"So I am, and my darling (Heaven bless her!) will be true to me, come what may; but it's true all the same that her mother won't consent, and ordered me out of the house as though I had been a scavenger or the follower of some equally humble trade."

"It can't be Joan! I don't believe you would be so false as to try to win her from me!"

Ronald smiled.

"My dear fellow, it is not Joan; and if you will forgive my frankness it may satisfy you to know I would not marry the heiress of Fernlea if she were the only woman in the world. I don't like your divinity, Norman, and that's the truth!"

Norman looked a trifle sheepish.

"Of course I never thought you would play me false; but how could I help being alarmed when you spoke of her mother turning you out of the house. I don't know a fatherless girl in the county except my Joan."

"You seem to forget your Joan (I doubt your right though so to speak of her), has a sister."

Norman opened his eyes.

"That child?"

"She is not precisely a child! She is less than two years younger than her half-sister."

"But isn't there something odd about her?"

"A great deal. She is simple-minded, honest, and disinterested. I believe all these qualities are thought 'odd' nowadays."

"Of course you are doing it out of pity. You couldn't really care for a half-educated child?"

Ronald smiled.

"Have you ever seen her?"

"Yes!"

"Have you ever spoken to her?"

"Never!"

"Then I maintain you know nothing about her. Natalie is a pretty child now. In a few years' time she will be a glorious woman; but that has nothing to do with the question. The fact is, after defying Cupid for a goodly number of years I have been caught by his darts at last. I believe, Anstruther, at this moment I am as desperately, as utterly, and as foolishly in love as you are!"

"And with that child?"

"With Natalie Daventry!"

Anstruther seemed as if he did not believe his ears.

"And you mean to say Lady Julia refused you?"

"With the greatest scorn!"

"Why, I always thought the little thing was one too many! I should have said her mother would have been thankful to see her married to any one respectable, much more to such a *parti* as Mrs. Yorke's son!"

Ronald drank off a glass of wine at one draught before he said, slowly,—

"Don't think me a conceited idiot, but I, too, had fancied Lady Julia would be glad to see Natalie off her hands. The child has no fortune, her tastes are of the simplest. I could have settled two hundred a year on her in

case of my death, and my earnings amount to sufficient for a simple, refined home. Poverty need never touch my wife, and she would be welcome in any society. I confess I did not expect the ignominious failure which came of my interview with Lady Julia. If Nita herself had rejected me I should have understood it better, a man of my age, weary and world-tossed, could hardly hope for the treasure of a young girl's love, but having now her consent, I own I counted on Lady Julia's."

"But what does she expect?" asked Anstruther, in a troubled tone. His friend's prospects were decidedly superior to his own, and he was thinking if Lady Julia demanded a more important sutor for unloved Nita, what would she not require of the man who should win her idolized Joan!

"Nothing," said Mr. Yorke. "At least, I will explain presently; but just tell me one thing first. You know the Daventrys well abroad."

"Intimately."

"Did Lady Julia ever strike you as a religious fanatic?"

Mr. Anstruther laughed.

"You must be dreaming, Yorke. Lady Julia is not in the least religious. She is nominally a member of the English Church, and I fancy she goes two or three times a year when some celebrity is to preach at a fashionable church, but I believe she is at heart an infidel. I don't like to say it of any woman, but I am positive she is practically an unbeliever. I have heard her jest at religious things till I felt thankful Joan was her daughter only by name," here the young man shuddered. "I am not what is called straightlaced, but I think atheism is terrible in a man, and ten times more so in a woman."

Ronald sighed.

"Then why does she refuse my suit?"

"Surely you do not mean me to infer Lady Julia refused you as a son-in-law because you were not religious enough to please her?"

"No," he based her refusal on the grounds that Natalie could have no earthly husband, being destined to become the Bride of Heaven; in other words, she means to shut up my pretty love in some foreign convent."

"She can't," returned Mr. Anstruther cheerfully. "The girl is a Protestant."

"I know in my heart she cannot," answered Ronald slowly. "I know that, even if a mother could be cruel enough to consign her child to a living tomb, by the law of the land no English subject can be immersed in a foreign convent against her will. I know all this, I tell you, Norman and yet it brings me no comfort. Lady Julia is a clever, uncorrupt woman, Nita a simple, innocent child. The battle is a cruelly unequal one, and something tells me my darling will be conquered."

It was strange to see how the two friends had changed places. It was Anstruther now who advised and reasoned, Ronald who listened, and was comforted.

"You are worrying yourself over nothing," said the author, quietly. "If only Miss Natalie keeps firm, and refuses to be a nun, no power in the world can make her one. If Lady Julia wanted her to marry someone else—if you had a rich, powerful rival, I might pity you; but this is a mere idle threat of my lady's. She is too much a woman of the world not to know the odium she would incur if she even tried to shut up her daughter in a convent. Why, every servant at the Hall, in such a case, would to your unpaid spies to report to you how it fared with their young lady, and every man in England would be Lady Julia's sworn foe. She would be held up to public execration in every corner of the land!"

Mr. Yorke looked thoughtful.

"Two years next October. It is a long time!"

"Do you mean you doubt your own constancy?"

His friend flashed at him a look of indignation, and was roused at once, which was just what Norman had intended.

"I doubt neither mine nor Natalie's! But,

"Gaspise me as you please, Norman, I am afraid of Lady Julia!"

"Why?"

Ronald shut his eyes for a moment, as though to reflect.

"Lady Julia has all the qualities of which great criminals are made. If she had been born in a lower class of life she would have stood at the Old Bailey before now!"

"None sense!"

Ronald continued as though he had not heard the interruption.

"Coming as she does of a high family, she has been spared the usual incentives to crime. Hunger, cold, and poverty have never troubled her; her temptations, if she has any, will come from another source; she has a violent temper and an indomitable will. I believe she would spare nothing that roused the one or crossed the other."

"You talk like a madman!" said his friend, resolved to quiet him at all risks. "You surely don't mean that Lady Julia would condescend to a triple murder? You, Miss Natalie, and myself have all three defied her wishes. You can't honestly believe our lives are in danger?"

"I wish you would be serious!"

"I am," and the light tone vanished. "You have convinced me of one thing, Ronald. Your heart is in this affair."

"So thoroughly, that if I lose Nita my life will seem a blank!"

"You won't lose her. It seems to me a pity to go to London."

"I could not trust myself so near, and yet feel I was forbidden to see her!"

"You might follow our example and meet by stealth."

Ronald shook his head.

"I would never ask any girl to do that for me; and, forgive me, Norman, but I could never love anyone who consented. I am better in London. Gray is staying for a while at Fernlea; he will bring me the latest news on his return, and while you are here I suppose I may rely on being warned if there is any hasty attempt to shut up my Nita?"

"I will do my best for you, old fellow; but—"

"You feel the task irksome?"

No; but you must remember Joan sees most things with her stepmother's eyes—she would never take Nita's part against Lady Julia, I am sure!"

"It is no question of taking parts, and, I don't see you need put any inquiries to Miss Daventry. All I want to know is whether Nita leaves Fernlea. Any servant at the Hall, any porter at the railway station, would do what I need!"

"What shall you do in London?"

"Work!"

"Shall you see Mrs. Yorke?"

"I may call."

"And tell her?"

Ronald laughed.

"My poor dear mother? She would want to be writing to Lady Julia and offer a fortune to be settled on my bride if only her ladyship would give in! No, Norman, I think you and Mr. Gray must be my only confidantes."

"And we'll stand by you! Why, Ronald, we shall actually be related if all goes well—brothers-in-law, or something like it!"

Ronald smiled a trifle gravely.

"I could envy you, not," he added, quickly, "because your bride is an heiress, and my Natalie's face is her fortune; but because five months at longest must put you out of suspense, and more than two long years must pass before I can free Natalie from her mother's tyranny!"

"I think you are hard on Lady Julia!"

"Perhaps; maybe my vanity is offended by her point-blank refusal to accept me as a son-in-law."

"There's one person could do more for you than anyone else," said Mr. Anstruther, after a pause.

"Who?"

"Jack Howard!"

Ronald started.

"I declare, I never thought of him! Anstruther, I owe you a thousand thanks; he'll be the best person in the world to speak to Lady Julia; he's her son, and Natalie's brother! I suppose he'd be the child's guardian in case the mother died—and he asked me himself to be kind to Nita. I declare, you've done me a deal of good. I shall go straight over to Paris and hunt him up!"

"The best thing you can do; he'll make her mother hear reason if anyone can, and I have always heard he is very fond of Natalie."

So the labels on Mr. Yorke's postman's bag and other properties were altered, and instead of journeying to London he changed at the great local junction and went on to Dover, catching the night boat to Calais.

He went for Nita's sake—to bring a friend and protector to her aid; but had he only guessed the troubles gathering round his darling he would never have left England. Had only anything warned him of what was to happen at Fernlea in the next few weeks he would never have left Blankshire, and would have paid spies to keep watch over the grand old house of the Daventrys, even if the doing so had taken the last farthing in his purse.

He was not a man of many intimates; the last person in the world to take many people into his confidence. He had, perforce, entrusted Mr. Gray with the secret of his love. Lady Julia was not likely to speak of it to anyone, and Norman Anstruther was faithful to the core, so that when Mr. Yorke left Fernlea only three people (besides Nita herself) knew he left it an engaged man; and only one living creature knew he was going to Paris, or the object of his journey.

Ronald had few letters, and those of no urgent importance. He had been content to make a long stay in Blankshire without sending his address to the people likely to write to him, and he was quite as content to go to Paris as secretly. He could not see Nita while she was under her mother's roof, and all letters he tried to send her would certainly be stopped before they reached her, so really his wisest plan did seem to be to go in search of the half-brother whom he knew loved her.

He promised to write to Norman as soon as he had anything to say, paid his bill at the inn with such a liberal overplus in lieu of notice that his hostess felt nearly consoled for the loss of such a lucrative friend; then once again confiding his little *flancie* to Anstruther, he got into the train and was whizzed away from Fernlea—hardly six hours after he had confessed his love.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. GRAY'S first thought, when he saw that terrible writing on the wall, was to get assistance, his second to obtain a light, the last was the easiest of achievement, for an inveterate smoker, he usually carried a box of wax vestas in his pocket. Striking one of these he speedily lighted the two candles on the mantelpiece; the ominous writing on the wall died out, and after peeling frantically at the bell he gave his whole attention to Natalie.

She was lying on the ground; she had evidently fallen there in a swoon the moment her eyes rested on those fatal words. Her face was white as alabaster, the long, dark lashes falling on the colourless skin, and adding by their contrast to the usual delicacy of her complexion. Lying there in a white dress, a little knot of Parma violets at her heart, filling the air with fragrance, she formed a picture which would have melted a far sterner heart than James Gray's.

Raising her gently in his arms tenderly as her own father might have done, he laid her on the sofa and began to chafe her icy-cold hands in his, while he awaited the answer to his ring.

It came promptly enough. The butler, whose mind was so uneasy after last night's excitement, had been on the alert for a

catastrophe; and Miss Daventry's own maid, a bright, vivacious damsel, professedly French, but whose name and piquant taste in dress were all that reminded you of her nationality, since she spoke English with the utmost ease.

Pauline was fond of Miss Natalie (as indeed all the servants were), and she set to work with restoratives to recall the poor girl to life; but for some time all her efforts were ineffectual. At last, with a faint gasping sigh, consciousness returned, and Nita opened her eyes.

"Where is it?" she asked, sadly, of Mr. Gray. "Oh! who could have been so cruel! I told you we should be parted. I seemed to feel it in my heart."

With a glance at the maid to enjoin silence, Mr. Gray proceeded to a deception which, if ever such were praiseworthy, surely deserved admiration.

"My dear child, what are you talking about?"

Nita looked at him reproachfully.

"The writing on the wall. Oh! Mr. Gray, don't try and persuade me I was dreaming. I saw it with my own eyes."

"If you saw it, Nita, it must surely be there now, for I followed you into the room the moment I heard your scream, and I give you my word of honour, neither I nor anyone else have laid so much as a finger on the wall."

Natalie seemed incredulous; the French maid seconded Mr. Gray with ready tact.

"It is quite true, Miss Nita. Mr. Gray and I have been too busy with you to think about walls, and Mr. Daniels, who was here for a minute, went straight downstairs to tell your mamma."

"But I saw it," protested Nita.

Very gently Mr. Gray lifted her off the sofa and placed her on her feet, asking—

"Which wall do you mean, Nita?"

"The wall opposite the door."

He signed to the maid to support her on the other side, and, leaning on them both, the girl feebly crossed the room and looked intently on the spot where she believed the fatal writing to have been; but she saw nothing. The white-and-gold paper looked as usual; there was not the slightest sign of anything having been written on it. Nita looked bewildered.

"But I saw it there," she protested. "Mr. Gray, I saw it. I can remember the very words 'Forget Ronald Yorke, or you shall share your nurse's fate!' I can see them now."

She had quite forgotten Pauline, who stood drinking in the wonderful revelation. Mr. Gray saw the mistake at once, but it was too late to rectify it, so he said to the maid—

"Miss Natalie is engaged to Mr. Yorke, but Lady Julia is against the match. Of course, with her mind running on her lover and on her nurse's strange disappearance, it is quite natural she should mix the two subjects."

But Pauline could not agree to this.

"I don't see that, sir; but it's plain enough she's had a terrible shock, poor, dear young lady. I declare it makes my flesh creep to think of her seeing such awful things."

"She did not see it," protested James Gray, "Nita," turning to her, "you were frightened and excited; your nervous fancy persuaded you you saw writing on the wall, but there was none—look for yourself. There is no trace of such a thing!"

Nita shivered.

"I saw it," she repeated, simply; "the letters shone in the dark like fire. They seem to have burnt themselves into my brain."

"My dear," persisted the lawyer, "I warned you you would feel nervous in this room. It is well-nigh impossible you could pass the night alone so near the apartment where your nurse disappeared without feeling alarmed!"

"Indeed, Miss Nita," struck in Pauline, who thoroughly agreed with the last senti-

ment, "you mustn't think of sleeping here; it might be the death of you. I'm sure if I go to my lady, and say you're not well, she'll order rooms in the other wing to be got ready. If you don't like me to speak to your mamma, Miss Natalie, I'll just say a word to the housekeeper. Mrs. Daniels' too tender-hearted to wish anyone to die of fright just to save her a bit of trouble."

The butler came back at this juncture. "I'm sorry to have been so long, sir, but my lady had gone into the grounds with Mr. Trevanon. She says she hopes Miss Natalie is better."

"Isn't she coming to see for herself?" demanded the lawyer, hotly.

"No, sir. I fancy she's a bit afraid of these rooms after last night. I said a word to my wife, sir, and she's got the room next Miss Davenport's ready for Miss Natalie. It would never do for her to sleep alone here, and if she's next her sister, Pauline will be close by if she needs anything."

"But mamma?" began Nita, timidly. "That's all right, miss. The strange gentleman, Mr. Trevanon, with a steady glance at the lawyer, "he was with my lady, and he up and said it would make him an idiot if he had to spend a night in the blue gallery, and that seemed to make a great impression on the mistress."

Pauline, with a French woman's tact, had quietly selected from the bedroom such articles as she deemed most useful for Natalie's toilet; and now she suggested the poorer the young lady was in bed the better, and though Natalie declared she was quite well she was glad enough to follow the bright-eyed servant downstairs, and to feel she would have her within reach during the night.

Left alone, Daniels looked at Mr. Gray with a puzzled face.

"What made her faint, sir? I'd have said Miss Nita was as brave as a lion!"

The lawyer hesitated for a moment.

"I have had to deny the whole thing to her and the maid, Daniels, or I should have had them both in hysterics. I had to declare over and over again that it was Miss Natalie's fancy, and she really saw nothing. You will keep your own counsel if I am frank with you."

"To be sure, sir!" The man's teeth chattered a little in spite of his valour. "Was it poor Mrs. Dent's ghost, sir?"

The door was shut, and both men stood with their backs towards it. Suddenly, without a word of explanation, Mr. Gray blew out both the candles. The effect was magical; in the darkness appeared once more the fiery warning. Daniels looked at it gravely.

"I always thought Mr. Yorke had an eye to Miss Nita. It's no wonder she fainted, sir!"

Mr. Gray quietly relighted the candles, and asked calmly,—

"What do you make of it?"

"Well sir, I don't think so much of the writing; that's easily explained. Most people know that phosphorus traced on any paper becomes visible in the dark, and shines like letters of fire. I can get over the writing easily enough. I see nothing uncanny in that. It's the other things I don't like."

"What things?"

"Where's Mrs. Dent, sir? The lodge-keepers both swear she never passed through their gates. They opened them at seven, and from then till ten, when they had the alarm of her loss, is so happens that those gates were not left a minute. Both those men are honest, trustworthy fellows, sir, and I'd take their word sooner than anyone else's oath. If they say Janet Dent never left the Farnlea grounds, depend upon it she didn't. As to her climbing over in the night she simply couldn't. No woman could, and she was rather stout, and getting in years she'd not have thought of such a thing."

Mr. Gray rubbed his forehead gravely.

"I'd much rather think she was out of the grounds than in them."

Daniels shook his head.

"She never got out of them, sir, I'm sure of that, and there's another point no one's cleared up yet. How did she get out of her room?"

This decidedly plain question was most unpalatable to Mr. Gray.

"It seems to me a mystery!"

"Just so, sir, and that Mr. Trevanon'll be a clever man if he finds it out."

"He'll do his best!"

"No fear of that, sir," said the butler, "admirably. Mr. Dent's a lucky one. He means to sleep in Mrs. Dent's room to-night. That message he sent was just a blind."

"I see!"

"As soon as over Lady Julia and Miss Davenport have gone to bed he'll be up here. I was to ask you, sir, if you'd wait, as he'd a word to say to you."

Mr. Gray looked as if he did not relish being left alone; but the butler came to his relief,—

"And I'll make bold to stay with you, sir. For I don't approve of tempting Providence (unless it's all in one's daily work, as it is in a detective's), and I know my wife wouldn't like to think of my walking down the blue gallery alone!"

So protector and protected sat in Nita's study, and pondered over the strange events of the last four and twenty hours.

Miss Nita looked as though she had been ill for weeks! "remained the butler. "I think, sir, Mr. Yorke had better have taken her with him. There'll be a deal of worry over this affair until it's cleared up, and most of it'll fall on her."

"Miss Natalie is a minor," explained Mr. Gray. "She can't marry anyone without Lady Julia's consent until she comes of age two years hence. Ah! here comes Mr. Trevanon!"

And so he did, laden with slight preparations for his comfort. A loose dressing-gown, a glass of whiskey toddy, a small reading-lamp, and a new novel. The detective was one who did things thoroughly. He meant to keep watch till morning; but he saw no reason why he should not make his vigil as little irksome as circumstances permitted.

"The young lady is better," he announced, cheerfully.

"Now, then, what frightened her? Of course there was something. I guessed that at once."

They told him. He frowned during the recital, and took the story of the phosphoric tracing far less calmly than the butler had done.

"I don't like it," he said, slowly. "I begin to think there are more people mixed up in this than I expected; and that poor girl doesn't look strong enough to go through much. I wish there was a sensible woman here."

Mr. Gray shook his head.

"Lady Julia has no intimate friends."

"And Miss Natalie?"

"Poor child! her friends are nuns and pensionnaires. She is but newly free from a French convent."

The butler had listened gravely.

"If you don't want a lady, sir," he began, "Pauline might be trusted. She is a sensible girl, and has been in the family some time."

"And therefore would range herself on the side of Lady Julia and Miss Davenport if it came to a question of divided interests."

"I don't think so, sir. Lady Julia is not a popular mistress, and Miss Joan is exacting. I believe you might trust Pauline."

"I don't see what you want to trust her with," said Mr. Gray, a little pettishly.

"Only this: I suppose you agree that Janet Dent's disappearance was not voluntary."

"Yes."

"You agree that she was forced by some power, natural or supernatural, to leave Farnlea?"

"I am afraid so."

"Well, till to-night I believed that her

enemy—we must give the unknown cause of her disappearance some personality—that her enemy was satisfied with having removed her."

"And now?"

The detective looked at him keenly.

"I have changed my mind. Janet Dent was removed not because anyone bore a spite against her, but because while she was at Farnlea she would have guarded Natalie Davenport—with her own life if need required—from peril. The real danger, the real animosity both concern the poor child who is left to moulder her. I don't attempt to explain the mysteries of Farnlea. I won't take on myself to say whether they have a spouse assisting in them or not, but this much I declare, before even finding Janet Dent our first duty is to protect her ourselves."

The butler stared.

"But, sir, there's no one'd hurt Miss Nita, just a pretty child, with a kind word for everyone. It seems impossible she could have an enemy."

"But she has."

"Who?"

The detective shook his head.

"I mean to find that out, Daniels. I shall keep watch here to-night, and I don't think much will escape me; but I don't believe anything of consequence will happen. Depend upon it, all the warnings, all the terrifying appearances, will be reserved for Natalie Davenport."

"Then, sir, I wish you'd say a word to Pauline."

"You and Mr. Gray will do that better than I could. Just give her a hint not to let Miss Natalie walk abroad much by herself, and to take care she is not left alone for long together. Say we fear she will fret about her nurse, and go fancying she sees strange things."

They wished the detective "good-night" (what a mockery the words seemed), and left him to his vigil; Mr. Gray reflecting, as he went to bed, he should not at all have liked to be in the detective's shoes. But habit is very powerful, and Mr. Charles Trevanon, alias Isaac Sparks, had spent his nights in such very extraordinary places, had been mixed up in such very remarkable tragedies, that he was perfectly at his ease when the sound of his late companions' footsteps had died away, and he was left the only living creature in the blue gallery.

He looked the door leading into the gallery, and then coolly bolted the one communicating with Nita's study. This was the mode of entrance he thought any intruder would tamper with; but the small brass bolt once slipped, he could defy them. These precautions taken, he looked carefully round.

Nothing whatever had been changed in the room since his former inspection of it. The pile of clothes still rested on the chair; the bed was invitingly "turned down," as it had been—probably by the poor woman's own hands the night before.

It was a very simply-furnished room, rather better, perhaps, than is generally allotted to a servant; but then, Janet Dent had been no ordinary hireling. From childhood in the Davenport service, for seventeen years the personal attendant of Lady Julia's children, she could hardly be treated as a common domestic.

Mr. Sparks looked round the room anxiously, as though seeking to gather something of the character and tastes of its late possessor.

The bed was of iron, with what upholsterers call a "half toster." From this hung curtains of snowy dimity; similar curtains were at the windows. There was no carpet, but the floor was covered entirely with matting, and a really comfortable easy-chair and small table stood in one corner. There was a chest of drawers, and beyond those stood the other toilet implementa. So far, the room was just an ordinary sleeping chamber, and nothing more; but in a deep recess on one side of the fireplace stood a Davenport and a small book-case.



[THE MYSTERIOUS WRITING ON THE WALL.]

Mr. Sparks stared. Davenport's are not often possessed even by upper servants; nor do the most generous of mistresses usually provide such luxuries for the use of their retired nurses.

The Davenport, moreover, was closely locked, the top opening after the fashion of a desk; the six drawers at the side all were locked.

Mr. Sparks tried them all in turn; it was only the last which seemed to respond in any way to his pressure.

He tugged and tugged. It was not fastened, he decided, but had simply stuck, probably from years of disuse. One more pull, a little more violent than the others, and the drawer came slowly open.

Mr. Sparks examined its contents with an eagerness which even surprised himself. Alas! they were meagre enough. Only the likeness of a singularly handsome man taken in regimentals, and a small memorandum book, such as years ago romantic damsels were wont to begin enthusiastically on the first of January as a private diary, and renounce in despair before February was out, because the entries, so surely and perceptibly proved that they had nothing left to write.

The detective looked carefully at the portrait. It could help him little until he knew whether it was the personal property of the missing woman, or whether it had simply been left, forgotten in the lowest drawer of the Davenport by some bygone user of that tasteful *escritoire*.

Still, he turned it over carefully, and was rewarded by reading on the back, in a large sprawling hand,—

"To Jenny from Will. Xmas, 1849."

1849! Well, he might almost have guessed the date from the style of the whole thing. It was so old and faded, so evidently of the time before photography was invented. The only mode of presenting one's effigy to one's friends was in expensive paintings on ivory, or those even more unsatisfactory designs on glass, which now remind us a good deal of the cheap

"pictures" taken at fairs, and on the beach at popular seaside resorts.

Most probably this likeness had once had a leather case; now it seemed literally tumbling to pieces. There was the outside glass—the glass beneath the design on it, and the very loose and dilapidated cardboard back with that brief description,—

"To Jenny from Will. Xmas, 1849."

Surely "Jenny" meant Janet Dent. Her age seemed lost in conjecture, but Lady Julia had declared she *thought* she was forty-five. So twenty-eight years ago, when this poor gift had been bestowed, the woman whose fate was such a mystery had been a blooming girl of seventeen.

Who was Will? And what part had he played in Janet Dent's life besides giving her that remarkably untidy-looking picture?

Was he her lover? The dress pointed to a far higher station than her own; but then love levels rank in the opinion of some people.

Mr. Isaac Sparks turned the picture over and over reflectively. If it had been Janet's she must surely have attached some special value to it. It must surely have been bound up closely with some episode of her life, or she would never have kept it so carefully for well-nigh thirty years.

The book was next inspected. Of the ownership of this there could be no doubt, since "Janet Dent" appeared in a faint, pointed hand on the very first page.

It was the quaintest medley. There were recipes for puddings and stocking-knitting, interspersed with sonnets and extracts from the *Keepsake*. There were entries dated with scrupulous care, and entries with no date at all; but, though the detective read every page with unwearied patience, he came on nothing of a personal nature, nothing to tell him of the missing woman's inner life and history. He had plodded through ninety pages of housekeeping sentiment and needlework without gaining the slightest clue to the writer's connection with "Will"—nay, without ever so

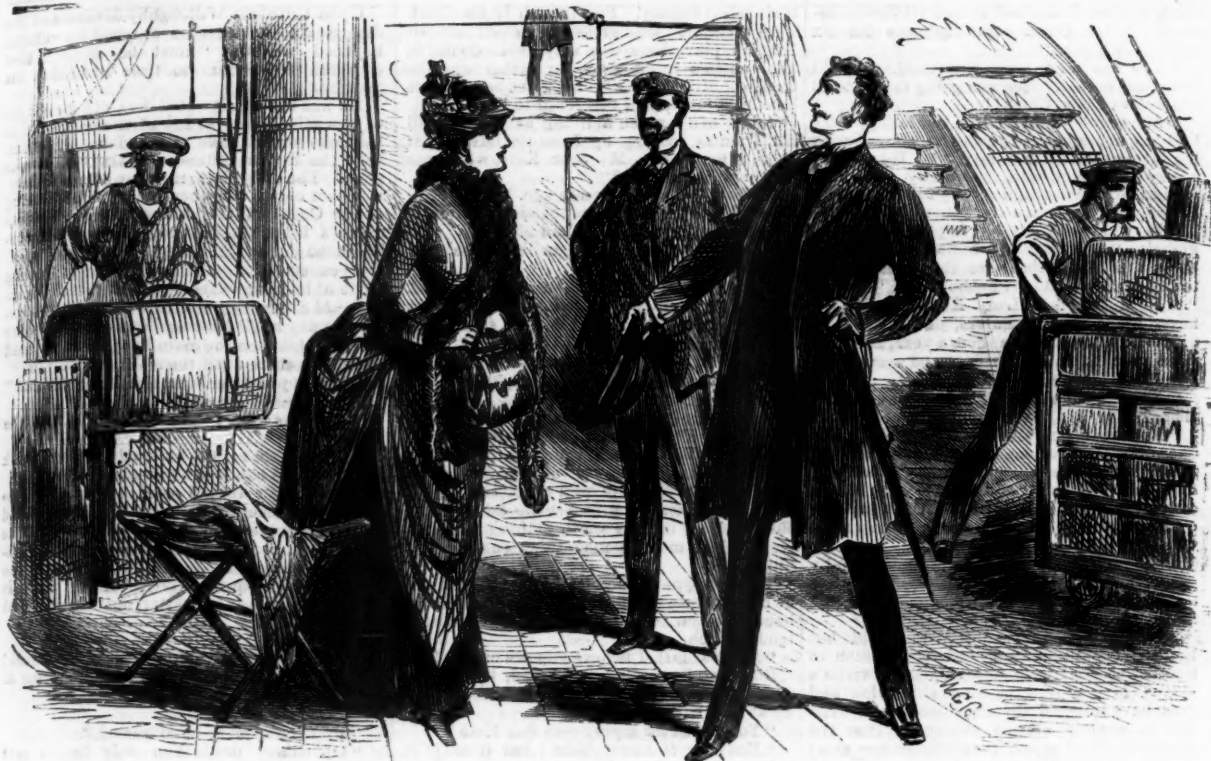
much as discovering whether Janet Dent had ever possessed a lover. He was going to fling the thing aside, when, on the last page of all, he came at last upon the clue he was seeking!

The entry was dated October, 1859, and it was written in a small, cramped hand, as though the authoress had had much difficulty in compressing her thoughts into the small space that remained.

"This day the lawyer went, and I was summoned to an audience with my lady. I hate her as much as I expected! How could there be anything but hate 'twixt me and her, considering the past and them that's gone? She asked me to go abroad with her and the children, and I consented. I don't know why I did it, for I hate her, and I can see she fears me; when I think of the past how could I refuse? I passed my word to him that's gone, and I'll keep my oath, come what may. I fancy my lady would not be for asking Janet Dent to go with her to foreign parts if she guessed the poor serving woman knew her secret and held her in her power! It'll be a strange life for me, all in new places and with no familiar face near me, but I'd do more than that for Miss Joan. She was her grandfather's darling, and I'd give my life for hers gladly. So I turn my back on home and friends just for a child's sake; and, unless I die first, the Squire's heiress shall live to rule at Fernlea. Night and day I'll watch and watch jealously, but, *unless they kill Janet Dent, little Miss Joan is safe!*"

That was all—not another word! The detective put the book in his pocket. Its last page confirmed his own theory as to the mysteries of Fernlea. He was as destitute as ever of proof; he could have brought forward no evidence in support of his assertion; but he would have staked his professional reputation on two things—poor Janet Dent was dead, and the cruel enemy who had hurried her into eternity would not rest satisfied without another victim!

(To be continued.)



["WE ALL THOUGHT YOU WERE A CHILD!" CUTHBERT CRIED, IN AMAZEMENT.]

NOVELLETTE.]

WILLOUGHBYS' COUSIN.

—♦—

CHAPTER I.

The Willoughbys lived in Highshire, which has the character of being one of the most rigidly exclusive of the English counties. "Blood" meant everything in Highshire. People counted their pedigrees to such remote ancestors that to be able to trace your descent from the ancient Britons was a mere nothing in their eyes. There were so many lineal descendants of King Arthur (who, by the way, never, according to English history, had any children at all) in the county that, in order to create a sensation it would have been necessary to go a few hundred years further back—say to King Solomon, or, better still, Adam and Eve.

Still this amiable little foible on the part of Highshire was really a very innocent weakness, and troubled no one very much; for by some strange charm everyone in the neighbourhood who expected to be visited possessed the azure blood which was so much extolled. There actually were no *parvenus*, no self-made men within an easy distance. Society was therefore, strenuously select, though perhaps a little limited.

If you knew the exact status of all the people you might expect to meet at a dance or a dinner, you paid for the privilege by the monotony of always meeting the same individuals. There was a lack of novelty, a want of freshness about the Highshire festivities which was not, perhaps, quite atoned for by the unadulterated azure of the blood of the guests you did find there.

Highshire was a very small place, and but thinly-populated. There were no ruins, no lovely scenery, no spot of public interest to induce strangers to settle there. It was a

fine healthy neighbourhood, with great opportunities for botanists and the lovers of lawn-tennis, but to strangers it would have been fearfully dull; and so it came about that each family you found residing there had either inherited their homestead or else been drawn to come there by the proximity of a friend.

Of all the families who made up society, as the word was understood in Highshire, not one was more respected, not one more popular, than the Willoughbys. It was such a good old name, Mrs. Benyon said (and she was quite an authority on such things, for was she not the mother of an Earl?) and the Willoughbys had lived at Oakdene since the time of the Crusaders. There had never been a bad Willoughby among the men, or an ugly one among the women.

Oakdene was the pleasantest house imaginable to visit at, and Lady Kate the most charming hostess, while Sir Thomas was the soul of English hospitality. Maybe the three last facts—which were all strictly true—had contributed, not a little to another fact as yet not even suspected in the neighbourhood, namely, that Sir Thomas was considerably embarrassed, and there rested on Oakdene a mortgage so considerable that unless Cheviot (the heir) contrived to marry a fortune, there was but little chance of his ever freeing the estate.

The Willoughbys were a large family—six sons and two daughters; but Highshire thought it impossible to have too much of a good thing, and had been ready with congratulations over each successive arrival. Time had worn on now; the eldest daughter was married, two sons were at school, one with his ship on a voyage to the Pacific, another in the army, but quartered so near Highshire that he was always appearing when least expected. Cheviot, the heir, was at home, and his next brother, who was curate to the old vicar, whom it was hoped one day he might succeed. These two sons

and Hilda, the only remaining daughter, made up the home party.

They were gathered round the breakfast-table one bright July morning, but the sunshine from without was not reflected on the five faces which graced the board. Lady Kate looked troubled and alarmed, Hilda openly indignant, Sir Thomas seemed halting between two opinions, Cheviot sided with his sister, and it was only the young clergyman who had the courage to stand up for the offending cause of all those gloomy faces.

"Blood is thicker than water," he said, gravely. "To my mind it would be mean to refuse."

"We can't refuse," said Sir Thomas, resolutely. "I should feel ashamed of myself for the rest of my life if we did, but, all the same, I consider it an unwarrantable liberty."

"So do I," acquiesced Cheviot; "and I think we ought to refuse. We may be saddled with the whole family next. How many are there of them, mother?"

Lady Kate looked up from behind her silver urn and shook her head.

"I have no idea."

"But you must know something about them, mother, if they are your own relations!"

The mistress of Oakdene looked so near to tears that Hilda answered for her.

"I don't see that you can call them relations!"

"Well!" objected Cuthbert, who was very exact. "The letter certainly begins 'My dear cousin.'"

"Lina was my second cousin," confessed Lady Kate, feeling very much as though she were acknowledging a crime. "She was not at all pretty or accomplished. Mother had her to stay with us once, and I—liked her!"

"Beware!" said Cheviot, mischievously, to his sister, "see what comes of being thrown with a second cousin, and—liking her. You are expected to adopt her children."

"It's not so bad as that," said Sir Thomas, sharply, taking up the thin sheet of flimsy

foreign paper which had caused all the excitement. "Mrs. Clark expressly says for six months or a year."

"You are all interrupting mother," said the young curate. "She was going to tell us all she knew of Mrs. Clark!"

"My dear!" said Lady Kate, feebly, "the 'all' is not much. Lina went abroad with her father soon after I married. He wanted a very nice man, and the family were very glad to advance enough money to take him to Africa, and give him a start there."

"In what capacity?" inquired Cheviot, gravely. "Did he dig for diamonds, or buy sheep? I believe those are the chief careers to be found in that part of the world."

"He died," said Lady Kate, simply. "I never heard the particulars, but I know he died before he had been there a year, and when Lina went out as a governess, and eventually, I suppose, married this Mr. Clark."

"Then you really knew nothing about them?"

"Nothing for certain. I did make inquiries once of some gentleman I met who had been in Africa; but he said the only Clark he remembered was an hotel keeper, who had a sort of music-hall as well. Of course he couldn't be sure, but the description of his wife seemed to apply to Lina."

The four faces round her grew additionally grave, and Sir Thomas took up the letter once more, as though bent upon extracting further information from it.

Alas! the lines were few, and told but little. The paper and envelope, which in another case might have betrayed the writer's status, here proved nothing, since rich and poor have imbibed the prejudice that if writing to anyone abroad you should use the flimsiest sort of paper, even though one sheet of ordinary thickness would contain all you have to say, and be well under the half-ounce weight.

The writing was good and distinct, but then Mrs. Clark had been a governess, so her penmanship was more a memorial of her past education than a testimonial to her present gentility.

This was the letter in its entirety:—

"Delamere Hill,
Port Mary,
July 1st, 1885.

"DEAR COUSIN KATE.—Many years though it is since we parted I have a warm recollection of the kindness you showed to me in England, and therefore do not hesitate to ask a continuation of it for my only daughter. Izetta is the last of eight children, and she has lately shown such signs of delicacy that I am urged to send her to England at once. My husband has no relations whom we could ask to take charge of her. It is simply impossible that in his present position I can leave him; therefore I am, writing to beg you for the sake of Auld Lang Syne, to give a home to our darling until we can reclaim her. Mr. Clark hopes to be able to return to England in the early part of next year. Should this hope be frustrated, Izetta could come out to us in March.

"All we are anxious for is that she should enjoy a thorough change, and be spared the African summer, which lasts from November to February. The case is so urgent that I am unable to wait for a reply before despatching my darling. She will be at Southampton a week after you receive this, and in commending her to your care I feel sure of her happiness.

"I will write again more fully next week. With my kind regards to your husband and children.—Believe me, dear Kate, your affectionate cousin,
"LINA CLARK."

Poor "Cousin Kate!" She was not a strong-minded woman. She had ever, as an Earl's daughter, held her own in Highshire; but she had imbibed to the full every prejudice of the place. Her eyes actually filled with tears as she thought of her fate in being the one to introduce a questionable character into

their select society. For, though Izetta Clark was certainly the great-grandchild of an English peer, there was very little doubt in her cousin's mind that her father was the identical Mr. Clark who kept the second-rate hotel and music-hall described to her.

"And can't make a living at that!" said Sir Thomas, looking up from the letter; "at least, it seems so. My dear Kate, when was your cousin married?"

"About twenty-two years ago."

"And this girl is the last of eight children. Why, Kate, it won't be so bad after all. She must be a mere baby of ten, or thereabouts!"

But Hilda interposed.

"That will be worse than anything! A young woman might for shame's sake hold her tongue; but a vulgar child will go chattering about the house to everyone!"

"I don't think children are vulgar," said Cuthbert, quietly. "And you might keep her in the background, poor little thing!"

"Anyway, we can't help having her," decided Sir Thomas in his heavy way. "And I don't see that we are bound to give Highshire the family history of all our guests. A young lady would have been undesirable; but a child who only wants a little petting and change of air is quite another thing. Really, Kate, we are making mountains out of mole-hills."

The young people had left the table now, and he came across to his wife, putting his large hand down on her soft, white one with a very tender touch.

"My dear girl, I believe you are crying!"

She was five-and-forty turned, but in his eyes she would always be a girl. She looked up at him with moist eyes.

"You are never crying over this Kate?"

"Not over this only, Tom; but it may be the beginning of troubles!"

"How?"

"You told me it was most important no one in the county should suspect our difficulties."

"So it is. When once Hilda and Cheviot are married we will retrench. Cuthbert would be happy in a cottage among his poor; the two next lads have their profession, and if you and I professed a distaste for living alone in a great empty house, and preferred to live abroad, no one could blame us, and the twins would pick up French and German for nothing. But I don't see how this child's coming can interfere, for I must keep on our present mode of living until Hilda is provided for, or Cheviot finds an heiress."

"I don't believe he ever will!"

"Kate! Why, I thought you believed your first-born irresistible?"

"But he says heiresses are always plain, and that he has not the least desire to marry at all."

"That's better than an intense desire to marry the wrong person. Come, Kate, cheer up. Meta is the only one of our flock married yet, and you can't deny she has done well!"

"Very well. But Colonel Grey is the last man in the world I would ask a favour of."

"I have no intention of asking him one. He knows something of our embarrassment; and himself suggested Cheviot would do well to propose to his ward. I rather like Grace Lingard myself. She is a very amiable girl, and of good birth, without counting that her twenty thousand pounds would free Oakdene."

"She has red hair, and squints," said my lady. "Cheviot told me so."

Sir Thomas winced; he could not deny the charge. He was also aware that, at five-and-twenty, he would have strenuously objected had any one suggested Miss Lingard to him as a suitable bride.

"Well! well!" he said, a little sadly, "I don't want to hurry the boy. It's his own interest I'm thinking of, not mine. Now, Kate, what is to be done about that child?"

She will be at Southampton, I suppose, some time next Tuesday. Don't you think some one had better go and meet her?"

"I will ask Cuthbert," replied my lady. "If he can spare time, I know he will go."

Upon Cuthbert Willoughby devolved all the disagreeable duties that cropped up. From boyhood all the "must be done's" that occurred from time to time had been his portion.

He was not a prig—still less did he set up to be a saint; but yet any of the household at Oakdene would have felt, had he left them, that the higher influence of their home was gone. The only plain member of the family, the least clever one, there was yet something about Cuthbert the others lacked. He was Hilda's favourite brother, although he contradicted her as Cheviot never attempted to.

A consultation with his Vicar, a setting aside of his own wishes, and Cuthbert found he could catch the mail-train to Southampton on Monday night (Oakdene was only five miles from a station on the main line), and be spared to remain there until the steamer came in.

"I wish you would come with me, Hilda!"

Hilda opened her eyes.

"Whatever for? It would double the expense!"

"I forget that; but, seriously, do you think a young man can look after a sick child?"

"Far better than I could! You have so much experience in the parish. People send to you whenever they are ill, just as much as a matter of course as though you were a professional nurse. Besides, Cuthbert," and she looked at him reproachfully, "if the child is very terrible I had far better not see her just at first!"

"Why not?"

"I should be sure to show my disgust! Now you will represent yours as a matter of conscience!"

Her brother smiled.

"I don't expect to be disgusted."

"Of course not! You will be in your element. Didn't you go to the Sunday-school treat last week, and come home saying you had enjoyed yourself, though you travelled in a carriage with fourteen dirty little boys, and three or four went to sleep with their greasy little heads on your shoulder!"

"I confess to the accusation. Then you won't come, Hilda?"

"Certainly not!"

"At least you will be good to the poor little thing when she comes?"

"I shall n't eat her."

"No; but you may freeze her with one of your scornful looks. Just put yourself in her place, Hilda!"

"I'd rather not."

"The youngest of eight children with a father and mother to be sent thousands of miles to live with people she has never seen."

"And who have not the slightest wish ever to see her!" pouted Hilda.

Cuthbert sighed.

"She can't help being poor," he said, gently.

"Nor her parents presuming on the luckless chance which makes mamma their second cousin!"

"Well, no!"

"Now, Cuthbert, you have relieved your conscience," said his sister, laughing, "and, really, I don't mean to ill-treat Miss Izetta (what a name, by the way!). Mamma means to have the old nursery turned out for her, and I'll see that it looks cosy!"

Her words meant more than they said, and her brother thanked her with a smile.

"And you won't let Cheviot tease her?"

"Poor Cheviot!" said Hilda, dolefully.

"He's being teased enough himself just now. Cuthbert, did you ever hate a girl without seeing her? I dare say you're too good, but I'm not, and I hate Grace Lingard!"

Cuthbert laughed.

"Has that cropped up again?"

"Very much so. Meta has written asking,—no, demanding's more the word—that Chev should go to Yorkshire for the Twelfth, and with all his love of grouse poor Chev would rather not."

"Meta is a clever woman."

"Very! So clever that she knows you are

impracticable; but she still has hopes of Cheviot and me!"

"Indeed! Is there another ward destined to make you happy—a brother of Miss Lingard, perhaps?"

"No, not a brother, a friend! Now, Cathbert, answer truly. Can you fancy me a second Meta? Can you imagine me tied down for life to a man like Colonel Gray?"

"I can't."

"Then be merciful to me and persuade mamma not to send me, otherwise I shall be despatched like a lamb to the sacrifice. You know Meta's invitations are like royal commands—we never dare to refuse them!"

"She does not favour me with many?"

"Because she knows you won't leave the parish. Besides, she has not charged herself with your settlement in life. She thinks if she marries me and Chev respectably, when you make the peaceful *mesalliance* she expects it won't matter so much."

Cuthbert smiled.

"One of my own school-teachers, isn't it, Hilda, that she has fixed on for my undying?"

"Why, no! I think it's a district visitor. She says that you have no eyes, and would be taken in by any one who carried a bag of tracts, and looked gravely."

"What a wonderful woman is our elder sister! She always seems years older than mother."

"Years!" I shall tell her the next time she worries Cath, that you are going to wait for Izetta."

"Hilda?"

But Hilda went on mookingly.

"That as you despair in finding the needful combination of virtues in a woman, you have fixed your hopes on a child. Cath, how black you look! Surely you're not angry at my nonsense?"

"Not if you never let the child hear it?"

"Cuthbert! Of course I should n't!"

Cuthbert Willoughby was five-and-twenty, and, in point of age, third in the family. Their mother had married young (absurdly young, the spiteful said), so that she was only eighteen years older than her daughter, Mrs. Gray. In the first five years of Sir Thomas's married life there had been a baby every twelve months, but then came a distinct gap. Hilda, the youngest of the group, was twenty-three, but Allick the sailor was barely eighteen, and the twins now at school were noisy pickles of twelve. The young soldier really came between Hilda and Cuthbert, but the latter living at home had always seemed to Miss Willoughby her special brother.

He was curate of Oakdene church, which brought him in the splendid income of a hundred and fifty a year. A legacy from a godfather brought in exactly the same sum; so that the Rev. Cuthbert was entirely independent of his father. He lived at home, because they all wanted him to; and Sir Thomas would have been insulted had one of his children offered remuneration for his keep; but bed and board were all Cuthbert would accept. He kept his own horse, paid his own bills, and (a larger item) contrived his own charities. He seemed to have the gift of making money go a long way. His earnings and his godfather's legacy combined represented far less than his brother's allowance, yet Cheviot was always in debt, even though he contrived that many of his personal expenses should come out of the family exchequer.

"Mr. Cuthbert"—as he was called far and near, till strangers began to think it must be his surname—reached Southampton, and put up at the South Western Hotel. The steamer, he was told, would not be in dock till Wednesday afternoon—she was not due at Plymouth even till the next day. This was rather annoying to a man who hated waste of time; but Cuthbert contrived to find a brother Oxonian, who had a curacy a few miles out of Southampton, and in renewing their old friendship time passed very pleasantly until he could go in search of his distant cousin.

Of course she was his cousin—third or fourth

probably, but Cuthbert thought it would make the poor child feel less strange if he insisted on the relationship. He had telegraphed to Plymouth to the captain of the steamer, saying that "Miss Clark's cousin would meet her at Southampton," and very much surprised would he have been could he have followed his message and witnessed its reception.

For Sir Thomas Willoughby had made a great mistake in his interpretation of Mrs. Clark's letter. She said, and truly, that Izetta was the last of eight children. Still she did not mean the last to enter the world, but the last to leave it.

Izetta was her first-born. Seven little lives had come and gone since her birth, so that the young lady for whose benefit the old nursery at Oakdene was being turned out was one-and-twenty!

She was sitting on deck when the captain showed her the telegram. He was an elderly man, and he had known Izetta's father many years, so that he took almost a parental interest in the girl.

"So I shall n't have the pleasure of a visit from you, Miss Izetta. If there had been no one waiting I should have sent you straight home with Mrs. Drummond till I had time to run down to Highshire with you myself."

Izetta smiled gratefully.

"You are so kind, Captain Drummond!"

"Not a bit of it. Well, my dear, I hope you'll grow well and strong in the old country. You look better already!"

"I feel quite strong. Captain Drummond," and she looked up into his face a little dubiously, "I want to ask you something."

"Ask away, my dear!"

"Did you ever hear anything of these Willoughbys. Mother had not seen them for years and years; only Uncle Charles being unmarried, there was no one else."

"They're a very good family, my dear—rather proud. All the Highshire people are that; but they won't be likely to show their pride to you!"

Izetta laughed.

"Do you know I rather think they will."

Captain Drummond looked bewildered.

"I think all England has heard of your father, and would be glad to do honour to his only child."

Izetta laughed again.

"But Clark is such a common name, and you know my grandfather was sent to Africa because his friends wanted to get rid of him. Mother was working for her living when she met papa!"

"More praise to her!"

"Yes, we think so; but do you know the Willoughbys have never written to her, and we were so much amused a few years ago. She asked Mr. Ducie about them, and he told her Lady Kate had actually inquired of him if he knew any one of the name of Clark. Very poor people she thought, but respectable."

Captain Drummond was laughing till his sides shook.

"Miss Izetta it is too rich!"

"Well, Mr. Ducie never once thought of us. He told her the name was a very common one at home, still he had not often met with it in the colony; but there was a Mr. Clark who kept a kind of hotel with a low music-hall attached, and he says he is quite sure Lady Kate put that person down as my father."

"Of course you will undeceive her?"

"Well, I don't know!" said Izetta, mischievously. "Mother and I get so tired of being the 'leading ladies' of Port Mary that I really think it would be quite pleasant to be nobody for a little while!"

"But if they snub you?"

"I don't think they will," and her eyes looked tearful for a moment. "I believe I have been too spoilt to stand that. Uncle Charles will be home from Germany in September, and I could go to him. Mother did not quite like it for me, as he is unmarried; but I daresay he has a housekeeper, who would see I did not catch cold (mother has a panic if I cough), but I suppose when a woman has lost

seven children she does grow a little too anxious over her eighth, naturally, and that sort of thing."

"You an innkeeper's daughter! I never heard of anything more absurd!"

"I am afraid I don't look the character quite," said Izetta, demurely. "I wouldn't let mother be communicative in her letter. Really, I think the Willoughbys know only one fact about me, that I am their far-off cousin."

"Well, if they are not good to you come straight down to Southampton."

"No, I mustn't. Mother said I was to make the best of it till the first of September—only four weeks—and then telegraph to Uncle Charles. He will be delighted to have me, for though he is about the worst correspondent in the world when he does write, he always asks when father is going to send home his little girl."

"I hope I shall not see Mr. Willoughby," exclaimed the Captain, suddenly. "I know I should betray it all."

"Is it Mr. Willoughby who is waiting at Southampton?"

Yes; I expect it's the curate. He always does the family errands. My wife says she used to visit in Highshire pretty often till her father died, and she knew the Willoughbys well."

"And did she like them?"

"She said they were very proud—but then Susan was their lawyer's daughter, so I daresay they looked on her as quite beyond the pall of their magic circle."

"I feel quite sure they are horrid!"

Nevertheless, the following afternoon Miss Clark arrayed herself with special care, as though even the first impression she might make on a "horrid" cousin mattered to her. The maid who attended her had been dismissed at Plymouth, but Izetta had lived too long in a colony where the best of servants are given to absenting themselves suddenly to feel lost at her absence. The young lady had been told so often she was pretty she had rather tired of the adjective; but though she might ascribe many of the compliments she received to the fact that her father was the leading man in Port Mary, still her looking-glass supplied her with the consolation that at least some of them were sincere.

Izetta had nothing foreign about her but her name. She was as perfectly English in face and figure as though she had spent all her days on the soil she was soon to tread for the first time—rather above middle height, slender and graceful, but without the painful thinness and perpetual angles which often accompany a willowy figure. The bloom on her face was almost too brilliant, too delicate for perfect health. It was the sole indication that she had undertaken a sea voyage at the doctor's orders. For the rest, her violet eyes and long, dark lashes, her silky, dark eyebrows, her thoughtful, expressive features; in fact, the *tout ensemble* of the oval face, framed in waves of deep golden hair, might have disarmed the hardest heart.

She was dressed in rigid simplicity; but yet to an experienced eye every article of her attire had been purchased "regardless of expense." Her little French boots, her many buttoned gloves, the exquisite texture of her plain black cashmere, the quality of the narrow lace frill at her throat and wrists did not tell of any economical ideas. And if her black chip hat had neither feather nor flower, the silk velvet which trimmed it had been put on by skilful fingers which surely learned their art nowhere but in Paris.

Cuthbert Willoughby stepped on board and inquired for Miss Clark.

"If you will tell the stewardess," he said to the person he was addressing, "perhaps she will kindly bring the young lady."

The first officer, who heard the request, came up with a smile.

"Miss Clark is on deck. Perhaps you would like me to introduce you?"

Cuthbert saw a girl of unusual beauty, with

all the marks of refinement and breeding he was used to in his own home. His carefully-prepared speech of welcome to his "little cousin Izetta" died on his lips. He stood perfectly speechless, and it was Miss Clark herself who at last broke the silence.

"It was very kind of you to come to meet me. Mother hoped Lady Kate would send someone."

The spell was broken; Cuthbert found his voice at last.

"I fear you will not think much of me as an ambassador. To tell the truth, I was too much surprised to speak!"

"Surprised!" and she looked at him in amazement. "But why? You had never seen even a portrait of me! You could have no idea what I was like!"

"We all thought you were a child!"

Izetta's composure gave way; she burst out laughing. Cuthbert joined in her mirth, and they felt from that hour they were friends.

CHAPTER II.

POOR CUTHBERT! Never since he had been of an age to be entrusted with his mother's errands had he felt in quite such a predicament as when he and his far-removed cousin were seated at one of the small tables in the dining-room of the South-Western Hotel partaking of refreshments preparatory to catching the five o'clock train to Oakdene.

The young curate would gladly have ordered the meal to be served in a private sitting-room; but the idea never occurred to him until he and Izetta had actually taken their places. Then, too, Cuthbert was not used to strange young ladies. Of course he knew all the girls who visited at Oakdene, but he was emphatically not a ladies' man, and Hilda had never calculated on his help to entertain her friends. Elderly matrons and children all "swore by" Cuthbert. Young people in the poorer walks of life claimed his advice in their difficulties; but it was probably the first time he had ever been *tête-à-tête* with a strange young lady and troubled by the consciousness her amusement depended solely on himself.

What on earth should he talk to her about? Her own home would have been the most natural theme, but poor Cuthbert had never studied books descriptive of life in Africa, so he really did not know much about it; and if her parents were really as poor as his mother believed she might not care to speak of home.

Poor girl, how neatly she was dressed! Cuthbert was sadly ignorant of toilet matters. He knew that feathers, flowers and bright colours were all considered by his lady-workers as most improper for poor people, and the utter absence of all these in Izetta's attire gave him the impression there must be similar views held by district visitors in Port Mary (if the town boasted such treasures), and that Miss Clark had proved an apt disciple.

It was full five minutes before he could think of anything to say; then he ventured on a question, which, considering his profession, was a natural one.

"I suppose you have churches out there?" Miss Clark betrayed not the least surprise. Many a friend coming out first to Port Mary had betrayed such a strange notion of what she expected there that Izetta had early grasped the fact that while people at Port Mary knew the smallest detail of all that went on at "home," English folk in general utterly ignored the existence of the sunny colonial town, and if called on to learn by the atlas such a place really was, imagined it to be little better than an island peopled by savages.

"Oh, yes!" she said, looking at Cuthbert with a smile. "We have five churches, besides a heap of chapels, and one or two mission churches for the Kaffirs. Mother can when there was only one church in the whole town, but that is long ago."

Mr. Willoughby felt relieved.

"I suppose you have lived there all your life?"

"We have always called Port Mary our 'home,' but we have travelled a good deal in the colony."

"And now you have to England I hope we shall be able to make you happy."

There was a suspicious moisture about her violet eyes.

"I shall miss mother every hour of the day, but I feel sure I shall like England."

"And Mrs. Clark gave some hope of being able to come to you next year."

Izetta smiled radiantly.

"If father possibly can manage it."

Mr. Willoughby imagined she meant "manage to raise the money." He little guessed that Mr. Clark held the most important government post in the colony; that he represented her Majesty on all state occasions, holding his levees in whatever towns he visited, while presentation to his wife was the utmost social distinction that could grace a young lady's *début*!

I trust your father will be able to arrange it," said Cuthbert, kindly. "I suppose he is of English parentage?"

"Oh, yes! Papa has been home twice, only mother could never come with him. She would never leave the children, and the doctors said it would not do to take them!"

"We fancied all your brothers and sisters were older than you. I feel sure the letter described you as the youngest of eight!"

"The last, not the youngest."

"But isn't it the same thing?"

"Oh, no! I was the eldest of all; but I have had seven brothers and sisters, though none of them lived to grow up!"

"Do you mean they are all dead—all seven?"

"Yes! Poor mother is always in a panic about me, because I am the last!"

Cuthbert did not wonder.

"It must have been a great trial to her to send you to England alone!"

Izetta smiled wistfully.

"You see I had grown thin and had a cough. I don't think there was much the matter, but mother took alarm. I wanted her to wait at least until she could get an answer from Lady Kate, but she was so anxious I should get used to England before the cold weather came she bundled me off at once."

In his heart the young curate felt glad they had not awaited his mother's letter, feeling very doubtful if it would have been warm enough to content them.

"I think they will be astonished when we get home. They have been turning out the old nursery for your reception."

Izetta laughed.

"I am very sorry to disappoint them. Then Lady Kate does not require a nursery herself?"

"Our youngest are twin boys of twelve. They ought to be at home now, but my married sister has taken possession of them. She lives in Yorkshire."

"How you must miss her?"

Cuthbert did not endorse the sentiment.

"She has been married nearly nine years," he said, gravely, "so we are used to her absence!"

"And have you no other sisters?"

"Only one. Hilda is a dear girl, but rather spoilt!"

"I'm so glad!"

"Why?"

Miss Clark forgot her *role* of poor relation.

"Because I've been spoilt all my life, and I like to think some one else is as bad. I hope Hilda and I shall be good friends. How old is she?"

"Twenty-three!"

"And I am two years younger. Do you think she will like me?"

Poor Cuthbert! He was the worst hand at deception possible. He blundered terribly over the reply.

"I hope so!" and the tone of his voice somehow filled Izetta with dismay.

It was almost a silent journey. Mr. Willoughby felt a little dismayed at the extent of his companion's luggage. Three huge packing-cases besides two leather trunks. It looked as though she intended to spend her life in Highshire. Perhaps Izetta understood he considered her belongings excessive, for she said, brightly, pointing to the largest case of all,—

"Really, this isn't mine at all! It is from father to Uncle Charles; but he said I had better keep it for the present!"

Cuthbert's heart sank. "Uncle Charles?" Who on earth was he? Mrs. Clark expressly said her husband had no relations to whom she would trust her child, so there must be something very disreputable about her brother-in-law.

"I had no idea you had any relations in England?"

Izetta opened her eyes.

"I have only Uncle Charles—and I have never seen him. Papa wanted to send me to him, but mother thought it would not do. She is so very careful of me!"

Cuthbert's opinion of "Uncle Charles" grew worse and worse.

"Where does he live?"

"He doesn't live anywhere. He spends a good deal of time abroad. I believe he is at Baden just at present."

Cuthbert set him down at once as one of those shabby ne'er-do-wells, who, without exactly breaking the letter of the law, go near enough to doing so for their relations to be rid of them, who, moreover, specially affect foreign towns, and have done much there to bring the name of Englishmen into dishonour.

"Your mother was quite right," he said, impulsively. "I am sure it would never have answered for you to go to your uncle."

The Willoughbys were too well bred to express the surprise they felt on seeing their guest.

Lady Kate was gently affectionate, as was her way mostly with girls. She felt so grateful to Izetta for not turning out tremendously objectionable that she received her quite warmly.

Sir Thomas, who (in spite of desiring Miss Lingard as a daughter-in-law) always admired beauty, followed his wife's lead. Hilda's heart was taken by storm, and, Cheb being absent, Izetta might fairly say her reception was all she could have wished.

"Dinner is at eight," said Lady Kate, kindly; "but do not trouble to dress to-night, for I am sure you must be tired. And, my dear, you will find your room very simple and unpretending, but we will change it to-morrow!"

Hilda—proud, unbending Hilda—linked her hand in Izetta's arm, and took her upstairs herself.

"Cuthbert may have told you of our mistake," she said, as she opened the door of a cheerful room to disclose a large rocking-horse and several other toys, while a respectably-dressed old woman sat sewing by the table. "We actually took you for a child; and this is the twins' nurse, to whose care we meant to confide you!"

Izetta smiled.

"I am sure you meant to be very kind!" she said, simply. "And nurse would have taken good care of me!"

"I will do that now, missie!" said the woman, pleasantly, "for you don't look over strong, and there's a lot of unpacking and that to see to when one's off a long journey. You tell my lady, Miss Hilda, I will see to your cousin, for Marie is busy with you and your mamma. I'll go down now and see about tea."

"Izetta," said Miss Willoughby, "do you know you have made a conquest? Nurse is almost the greatest person in the house. She turned me over solemnly to Marie when I was eighteen, and has devoted herself entirely to her 'dear boys' and the needlework ever since. She is a dear old soul! but she has been here ever since Meta was a baby, and

domineers over us all sadly! Mother was in qualms as to whether she should ask her to look after you (we thought you about ten, recollect) or get another maid; but, as nurse would have thought it an insult to have another servant in these rooms, we received her gracious promise to 'see to you.' This room was meant for your bedroom. Nurse's is opposite. Of course, we'll change it all to-morrow."

"But please don't!" besought Izetta. "This room is lovely! the view is perfect! And if I feel industriously inclined I daresay nurse will let me sit with her."

Hilda looked at her meditatively.

"Do you know," she said, with a sigh of relief, "you are not in the least what I expected? You might have lived in England all your life!"

Izetta smiled.

"Did you think I should be brown because I was born in Africa?"

"No. But—"

Izetta took her hand.

"Do tell me!" she pleaded.

"I feel quite ashamed of myself. But I thought you would be half-educated and—peculiar. You know I had never met any girl from Africa before, and a friend of ours told mother one Mr. Clark had had a great deal of—trouble!" she finished, not liking to allude to the family poverty in plainer words.

"So he has," acquiesced Izetta; "and mother too. I often think no one in the world can have known more sorrow than they have; but it didn't make any difference to my education. In our position, you know, I was obliged to study."

Izetta winced at that allusion to the musical-hall.

"I should never have guessed Mr. Clark's occupation," she said, slowly. "You don't look in the very least like it!"

"No," agreed Izetta. "Mother always said she hoped I should grow up quiet and retiring, because people would be so critical of me, knowing what father is. I'm glad you think I don't force people to know what he is by bad manners!"

"Your manners are perfect!" said Hilda, generously. "Now I must leave you, for here comes nurse with a cup of tea. Remember, mother doesn't expect you to dress."

A kind thought, which Izetta felt sure sprang from a doubt of her possessing correct evening attire. But Nurse had not quite grasped the family misgivings.

With a quiet air of command she unpacked one of the trunks, hearing from Miss Clark that the other and the packing-cases contained nothing required for immediate use.

A black grenadine dress, which Izetta had worn once or twice on board, seemed to Nurse a charming costume. And when the young lady had put it on, she regarded her work with supreme satisfaction.

Izetta always looked well in black, and the soft grenadine suited her graceful figure singularly. It was made with elbow sleeves and a square-cut bodice, both finished off with a creamy lace. Nurse would have liked a coloured sash, but Izetta shook her head.

"I don't wear bright colours yet. It is only six months since my last little sister died!"

Nurse apologised, and Izetta went downstairs to meet the critical glance of the family.

"You should not have troubled to dress!" said Hilda, kindly.

"I had plenty of time; and," not feeling perfectly sure how Hilda would construe the remark, "I always had to dress in the evening at home."

"Evidently she appeared among her father's guests," decided Cuthbert. "Perhaps she had to entertain them, and that is why she is so self-possessed."

Sir Thomas took her into dinner, and found her a sympathetic listener. Sitting there at his side, she might have been taken for an earl's daughter, she looked so graceful and aristocratic.

The Baronet took courage, and thought that

with Izetta's face even Highshire could not be too inquisitive as to her history.

"She might be anyone," he confided to his wife that night. "Well, I shall never believe in birth again."

"She is of good descent on one side," said Lady Kate, a little gravely; "but she is not in the least like her mother."

"Oh, no!" said Izetta, when taxed with this cast of resemblance. "Father says I am a regular Despard, in face and everything."

"A Despard! But his name is Clark!"

"His mother's name was Despard. I am called after her. Izetta and he says I am her image."

She shook her head.

"Not in the least. He is dark. Papa says I am just like my grandmother's picture."

"Is she dead?"

"Oh, yes! She died when papa was a boy."

"I really think we may venture to accept," said Lady Kate, about ten days later, putting a note into Hilda's hand.

It was an invitation from the Honourable Mrs. Benyon to a dinner party at Benyon Towers, the seat of her son, Lord Carsdale. The noble widow had called on Izetta, but the young lady had been out. The return visit had been equally unsuccessful, so that the Algiers of Highshire had not yet had a chance of conversing with Miss Clark.

Hilda glanced at it carelessly.

"Why not?"

Lady Kate hesitated.

"You know, my dear, she is very pretty."

"Itie," replied Hilda, who had a generous nature, and did not do things by halves.

"Why, mamma, she is simply beautiful!"

"And Lord Carsdale is young and unmarried. Do you think we are justified, knowing what her father is, in introducing him to Itie?"

"Perfectly," returned Hilda. "With her face she is not likely to look at a red-nosed, undersized little man like the Earl."

"My dear child!"

"Well, mother, you know I can't bear Lord Carsdale. I never could."

"But poor Itie is not in your position?"

Hilda drew herself up proudly.

"She is the lineal descendant of an English peer whose Earldom is twice as old as Lord Carsdale's, so that on one side her pedigree is equal to his. If we come to the other side, we know nothing against Mr. Clark except that he works for his living; and if rumour speaks truth, Mrs. Benyon did the same till she married."

"You seem quite to have changed your ideas," said her mother, mildly. "I have heard you declare there was nothing like birth."

"Nothing in the world," declared Hilda; "but in this case, Lord Carsdale and Itie seem to me equal; that is, they both count a peerage on one side and trade on the other; while personally, she is a million times too good for him."

"She is a dear little thing!"

"She is true," said Hilda, simply. "One couldn't imagine Itie cojoling her brother into a loveless marriage or writing angry epistles to her sister, because she won't travel two hundred miles to try and 'catch' a rich husband."

"Aren't you a little hard on Meta?"

"I feel as if I hated Meta!" cried Hilda, passionately. "She is so prosperous, she has got no feeling left. She wants to dispose of me and Chev, not from anxiety as to our welfare, but because she dreads our some day appearing as her 'poor relations.' She only lets Cuthbert alone because she's afraid of him. As to Cheriot, she has failed utterly this time. I got a letter from him this morning, saying that he couldn't possibly stand Miss Lingard any longer, and that he should be home to-morrow. Even if our African cousin turned out ten times worse than we expected it would be less annoying than life at Meta's."

"Well, go and tell Itie of the invitation. It includes Chevriot if he is at home, so his coming need make no difference."

Itie was writing to her mother, but she laid down her pen and welcomed Hilda to the old nursery with a very winning smile. She had not yet been a fortnight at Oakdene, but she had managed to win Miss Wilmoughby's whole heart. Hilda was not one to do things by halves; she had meant to dislike Itie thoroughly, but she loved her now very dearly—far more, in fact, than she had ever been able to love that managing, capable young woman who left Oakdene nine years before to become the wife of Adolphus Gray.

"A dinner party!" The girl's face fell.

"Hilda, dear, must I really go? Can't you and cousin Kate leave me at home?"

"I think you had better come," urged Hilda.

"You see Highshire is a very hospitable place, and we can't shut you up all the while you are with us. Benyon Towers is the best house in the county, and you had better make your *début* there than anywhere else."

Itie sighed dolefully.

"I would much rather stay at home!"

"But people would talk. This is rather a spiteful neighbourhood; they might say all sorts of things?"

"As—"

Hilda grew rosy red.

"They might fancy we were ashamed of you if we did not introduce you to our friends. Itie, you really must go."

"Very well. Hilda, do you know I used to fancy that myself?"

"What, dear?"

"You had seen so little of mother, and you knew nothing of my father. I said to mother before I came you might be ashamed of me."

"I am sure she judged us better," said Hilda hastily. "Her note was most trustful."

"She wanted to write and explain all about papa, but I wouldn't let her. You see, Hilda, every one we meet at home knows all about him, so I thought you would have heard, and then explanations are such horrid things. So mother gave way, only she said if you found me a nuisance I was to go on to Uncle Charles?"

"Well, we haven't, and I shall not hear of your forsaking us. Now you are going to Mrs. Benyon's; that settled. Oh, I have a piece of news for you. My brother is coming home!"

"I know," said Itie, blushing. "I have seen him walk up the avenue," alluding to Cuthbert, who had been to London on parish business for two days.

"Not Cuth; a far more distinguished person—my eldest brother Chevriot?"

"Oh!"

There was such a want of interest in the reply that Hilda felt hurt.

"You are quite sure to like him when you know him. He is the handsomest man in Highshire, and a general favourite."

Izetta shook head.

"Men like that are always conceited."

"Well, I suppose poor Chevriot is—just a little. How can he help it, when he knows he is the best-looking of the six boys, and the favourite into the bargain with all but me."

"Isn't he your favourite?"

"We are very good friends, but Cuthbert is my brother. There isn't a scrape I ever got into but I came to him to pull me out."

"I am sure he did it."

"Yes, and lectured me afterwards as a revenge. Cuthbert is a dear old fellow."

"He isn't very old?"

"Five-and-twenty—but he is the good boy of the family; the one who was always staid and tractable. Meta (that's my sister) says she despairs more of Cuthbert than of us all."

"But why?"

"He has been such a model young man, she feels sure when he does commit a folly it will be an egregious one! Then, too, Cuthbert won't submit to her influence."

"What particular folly does she expect him to commit, Hilda?"

"Matrimony!"

"But I thought Mrs. Gray approved of that! You told me she had made several plans for you and your eldest brother?"

"Yes; but she knows it's no use to plan for Cuthbert. The fact is, Itie, Meta and I don't often agree; but, in this one point I think she's right. Unless he remains a bachelor, I do believe he will present us with a most objectionable sister-in-law!"

"But why?" persisted Itie. "I should never have suspected Mrs. Willoughby of common tastes?"

"Why don't you say Cuthbert? You're the first person who ever called him 'Mr. Willoughby'!"

"Mr. Cuthbert, then!"

"Dear old Cuth!" said Hilda, slowly. "No, he hasn't low tastes; but he has a wonderful knack of appropriating what other people look down on. When we were children the ugliest toys, the least sunny piece of garden, was always Cuth's. At the present moment he rejoices in a horse so hideous no one else would buy him, and he has a dog which is such a terrible combination of cur and mongrel father says it is a disgrace to Oakdene!"

Itie was smiling, but there was a strange dimness about her eyes for all that. Hilda went on lightly.

"The ugliest, most backward children in the Sunday-school are sure to be pets of Cuthbert's. The most disagreeable old women and the least attractive old men are the ones made over to his ministrations; and as though doing all the hardest work of this parish was not enough, he has lately taken it into his head his lot here is too easy, and he should like to have an East-end curacy in London!"

"I like that!" said Izetta, warmly. "I honour him for it!"

"I suppose one ought. He wanted to go abroad as a missionary; but mother said it would break her heart, so then he took up the East-end scheme instead. Just fancy Cuthbert, who has always lived at home with mother, going into dirty lodgings in the East-end!"

"Must they be dirty?"

"Well, perhaps not. Then he is the least suspicious of mortals. He would be a prey to his landlady, pay generously for everything, and yet be nearly starved—unless he married."

"Which you hope he won't?"

"I don't know! He has a hundred and fifty a-year of his own, and I believe the lowest stipend as a curate would bring in another hundred. I don't see how he is to keep a wife on that unless—"

"Unless he fulfils Meta's fears, and marries someone altogether out of his sphere—a young school teacher, an energetic mission woman, or someone like that. Of course they would think two hundred a-year luxury, and as poor Cuthbert would feel such a wife the greatest possible help in his parish, and also know he was providing a home for a worthy young person, I fear some day or other Meta will have the chance of trampling over us!"

CHAPTER III.

THE first of September came and went; but Izetta Clark was still domesticated at Oakdene, and there seemed not the least chance of Uncle Charles receiving a visit from her. Itie fitted so easily into the family that it seemed her niche must have been there waiting to be filled. Lady Kate approved of her, Hilda loved her, Sir Thomas petted her, while the two young men, in their different ways, studied her pleasure in all things.

Outwardly she got on best with Cheviot. After recovering from his first amazement the heir of Oakdene struck up a very warm friendship with Itie. They rode together, took long rambles in company, and became so intimate that Hilda (though she breathed no hint of her suspicions) began to regard the

chance of Grace Lingard entering the family as more remote than ever.

Not that Cheviot made love to his beautiful cousin. Sir Thomas and Lady Kate would have detected that at once, and preached prudence to him. Not he paid her no attention a brother might not have offered. He treated her much as a younger sister, and only two persons were keen enough to notice the strange intensity with which he sometimes looked at her and to observe that his voice always softened in speaking to his far-off cousin.

And these two were Hilda and Cuthbert. The first was sympathetic, but troubled. It was one thing to uphold Chev in his objections to Grace Lingard, but it was quite another to encourage him in wooing a penniless girl. She loved Itie dearly. She thought no fairer mistress could have been found for Oakdene! but, alas! Oakdene itself had to be considered, and it seemed probable that Cheviot's bride would never reign there unless she brought a dowry sufficient to pay off the heavy mortgage.

Hilda never remonstrated with Cheviot. She might be mistaken, after all. Her handsome brother was such a flirt, and perhaps he was only amusing himself. To speak to him was impossible; but would it not be kind to give Itie just a hint? There would be no need to say anything to hurt the child's pride.

The chance came when Cheviot had been home more than a month. A note arrived from Mrs. Gray volunteering a visit from herself and Grace. Not even that fatal letter beginning "Dear Cousin Kate" had produced more consternation. Lady Kate declared it was "sweet of Meta to propose it, but the country was looking damp; it would be far pleasanter for her to come in the summer."

N.B.—As this was late September Lady Kate's wish would have deferred her daughter's visit for at least eight months!

Sir Thomas did not see why a woman should take her husband's ward wherever she went, and Hilda declared she was not at all anxious to make Miss Lingard's acquaintance.

"There seems to me," she said, "as soon as she was alone with her mother and Izetta, something positively indelicate in her coming here. Of course we know it is for their sake."

She spoke to Lady Kate, but she looked at Itie. That young lady showed not the least embarrassment. She said just in her usual tone,—

"If you think Mrs. Gray would prefer no strangers here when she brings Miss Lingard to introduce to you, you know, Cousin Kate, I could go to Uncle Charles!"

Lady Kate smiled.

"My dear, we can't spare you. As to Miss Lingard, I don't feel anxious to see her."

"I thought she was going to marry Cheviot?" for the more formal style of address had been dropped by Itie at general request.

Hilda marvelled at her calm.

"Itie, you are premature. As yet it is only one of Meta's schemes," Chev objects.

"I don't think he ought?"

Meta surprised; then a mild, "my dear child!" from Lady Kate.

Izetta smiled.

"I did not mean to be rude; but you know at home we have no 'eldest sons.' Men work for their living unless they have a fortune. Now, I meant as Cheviot does not seem inclined even to earn enough to keep a wife, if he marries at all he must choose some one who can keep him!"

Lady Kate sighed.

"Ah, my dear!" she said, wearily, "more hangs on it than you think; but I must go to the housekeeper."

Left alone the two girls grew grave; then Hilda said, suddenly,—

"Do you know I've been quite mistaken in you, Itie. I really fancied you and Cheviot were getting to care for each other."

Izetta laughed.

"I hope we are. I like Cheviot awfully. He seems almost like a brother to me!"

"And you wouldn't mind his marrying Grace?"

A light broke on Izetta.

"Not the least in the world if they can make each other happy. Oh Hilda!" and her cheeks grew crimson. "Surely you didn't think because I like to talk to Cheviot I was ready to marry him?"

"I know I should like to have you for a sister," replied Hilda, warmly, "though how, if my suspicions had been right, you and Cheviot ever could have existed I don't know!"

"Put the idea out of your head!" pleaded Itie; "please do, or I shall feel hot whenever I speak to him. I looked on him as good as engaged, and so I thought I might be quite friendly to him."

Hilda looked troubled.

"What made you think it?" asked Itie.

"He likes to talk to you, and —"

"And —"

"You talk a great deal more to him than to other people—Cuthbert, for example."

Izetta grew crimson; red, brow and cheeks were covered with blushes.

"I can't talk to Cuthbert if he doesn't care to talk to me," she said, quickly. "I am not unfeeling enough to please him; he told me so the other day."

"He couldn't. It's not like him."

"It was not quite that. He said different people had different gifts."

"Well, so they have."

"I was singing at the time, and I know he meant I was wasting my time, and that I had far better have been teaching in the infant school."

"Nonsense!"

"I mean it, Hilda!"

"Now, Itie, don't take up fancies. Cuthbert is not a ladies' man, but I am sure he likes you."

Itie declined to pursue the subject.

"When is he going away?"

"He has given Mr. Cadler notice to leave at Easter, and I suppose then he will carry out his heart's desire."

"It did seem such a pity he refused that living. Don't you think so?"

"No living was ever offered him."

"Yes. Last week Lord Cardale offered him Benyon. It is worth five hundred a-year!"

"Benyon! Why it is the dearest old place. Are you quite sure that it was offered?"

"Certain."

"Did Cuth tell you?" a little hurt that his confidence should have been given to Itie in preference to herself.

"Oh, no!"

"Who told you, then?"

"Lord Cardale."

"Oh —" Hilda began to see daylight at last. "Why did he offer it him?"

"He thought he would like to be near Oakdene. It was not a nice letter, Hilda—the refusal. I mean. It read as though Cuthbert was offended at the offer. It puzzled the Earl very much; he said they had always been such good friends. I promised him to ask Cuthbert his reasons."

"And did you?"

"Yes; but I could not get much answer. He said his duty called him to suffer, but he did not feel compelled to undergo such daily pain as a residence at Benyon must be to him."

"How very strange!"

"Wasn't it. I said a little in praise of the Rectory—it is such a dear old place, you know—and I said it was near the Towers, and he had always seemed friendly with Lord Cardale; but he said the Earl was such a contemptible puppy, and that, under the circumstances of the case, to offer him Benyon was a deliberate insult."

Hilda looked mystified.

"You must be dreaming, Itie?"

"No, it is the sober truth. I should say

Cuthbert was in a bad temper, only that he is not given to such follies."

"Why should he dislike Lord Caradale?"

"I have no idea. He seems to me a very amiable young man."

"I shall have it out with Cuthbert. I suppose you don't mind, Itie?"

"Don't say I was disappointed, that's all," said Izetta, simply; "but I don't think you will get any satisfaction out of the interview. You had far better let well alone."

"But I had rather not."

"You will make him angry?"

"I shall risk that. Cuthbert never has been really angry with me yet. Oh! for the mantle of Meta's management. She would set the matter before him so vividly he would be forced to give in."

Cuthbert had a sitting-room of his own which the servants styled the study, but was known by its master and his friends as the "den" once upon a time.

Hilda had spent a good deal of her time in the "den." Itie, too, had been there with her once or twice, but since Cheviot's coming the girls had discontinued their visits to the young curate's sanctum.

The door was not locked (it was Cuthbert's habit to turn the key when busy or engaged), so Hilda pushed it open and walked in. Her brother was sitting in a huge arm-chair drawn close to the fire. He may have been thinking of to-morrow's sermon (it was Saturday), but, if so, it must have been a funeral one, for his face was grave, almost stern in its expression.

"Now, Hilda, run away. I am too busy to listen to you!"

"You are not busy at all!" contradicted his sister, drawing the companion chair to his own up to the fire. "You're only warming yourself. I am going to follow your example; it's bitterly cold for September!"

Cuthbert smiled.

"I suppose you did not come here on purpose to tell me that?"

"Well, hardly. I want to talk to you. It's ages and ages since we had a confab!"

"I can't talk; I've got a headache."

Hilda looked at him reproachfully.

"First you're busy, then you've got a headache! Which am I to believe? Or is it you don't want to see me?"

He sighed.

"I ought to be busy, and my head is aching, Hilda; but perhaps the third reason is the most powerful one. I do not feel inclined to talk just now."

"It's good for people to sacrifice their own feelings occasionally," said Hilda, wickedly. "In church last Sunday you told us we sometimes ruined our friends by giving way to all their caprices. I like to obey your advice. So first you must sacrifice your own feelings, and listen; secondly, I am not going to ruin your character by giving way to your caprice, and going."

"You reason like an oracle! Well, after all this preamble, what is it?"

"Why did you refuse Benyon?" asked Hilda, who could be as blunt as her brother when she chose.

"Did she tell you I refused it?"

"My cousin Izetta told me. Why can't you give her a name?"

"Then you might as well have asked her the reason."

"She doesn't know it."

He started.

"I explained it to her fully. Heaven knows it was a painful task! Surely you don't want me to repeat it?"

"Itie told me exactly what you said; and it sounded like Greek to both of us!"

"Nonsense!"

"She said you called Lord Caradale a contemptable puppy, and you thought the offer of Benyon an insult!"

"So I do!"

"Cuthbert, are you growing mad?"

He pushed the hair back from his temples slowly, and answered,—

"I hope not."

"Then why are you so strange?"

"I think it is you, who are obtuse!" he retorted, quickly. "I suppose Izetta is too accomplished a coquette to give you the clue. But surely you are not quite blind? You must see!"

"I don't," said Hilda, speaking almost humbly in her bewilderment. Then, growing indignant as she recollected the charge brought against her friend, "and as to calling Itie a coquette, it's wicked of you!"

Cuthbert groaned.

"You will deny next that she is going to marry Caradale?"

"Certainly!"

"Then you have no eyes at all!"

"Perhaps not," said Hilda, coldly. "My father told me last week (which, I confess, did not surprise me) that the Earl of Caradale had proposed for Izetta."

"There!"

"Wait a moment! He was here half an hour, and then told papa he had been refused. He does not want to talk about (vain creature!), so he is coming here just as usual. He told papa he considered Miss Clark was throwing away such a chance as she might never have again. It made the dear old dad so indignant. Lord Caradale wanted him to remonstrate with Itie, but he refused, and he laid his embargo on mother and me not to mention the subject to her lest she should rush off to that Uncle Charles, who seems to be her haven of refuge whenever she thinks of leaving Oakdene."

Cuthbert looked into the fire more dejectedly than ever.

"Well," demanded Hilda, "what can she think of you?"

"That you have been very cross to her, and that you think her too useless for your mightiness to condescend to talk to her!"

"And you—Hilda! Don't you see it now?"

Hilda nodded her head.

"I think I do! I believe you, certain in your own mind that Itie was to be Lady Caradale, and that both she and the lord, unsuspecting you of caring for her, offered you Benyon as a kind of make-up. I have my own idea you do care for her quite enough to make it irksome for you to live at her gates, and see her another man's wife!"

Cuthbert shook himself after the fashion of a Newfoundland dog.

"You have found your eyes at last, Hilda!"

"But I was on a wrong track. I thought she cared for Cheviot! I actually told her so!"

"And she—"

"Convinced me she would be quite willing for him to marry Grace Lingard. It is strange," went on Miss Willoughby, demurely, "that though she refused to imagine herself Cheviot's wife when I told her I should love to have her for a sister, she did not dissent from the idea."

"Hilda, do be serious!"

"I am!"

"Then what do you think?"

"I think you ought to ask her that!"

"Think of her beauty!"

"Well, I never heard a curate was compelled to choose an ugly wife!"

"And—East London?"

"Oh!" said Hilda, frankly. "I expect she will be quite foolish enough to agree to it! She told me the other day she was tired of a useless life, and if she were not her mother's only child she should like to enter a Sisterhood. Why, Cuth, I thought you would be delighted! You used to consider Sisters as angels in human form!"

"But I don't want Itie to be an angel!"

"Ah! Don't you feel grateful to me that in spite of your excuses I persisted in staying here to chatter to you!"

"Well, perhaps I do!"

"And," went on Hilda, relentlessly.

"Don't you feel sorry you refused Benyon?"

"No!"

"Why not?"

"It would not be pleasant to Itie for us to owe our home to the Earl."

"'Us,' and 'ours.' Dear me, how confident some people are, to be sure!"

"Hilda!"

She bent over him lovingly.

"What is it, Cuth?"

"Will it be a blow to the mater and Sir Thomas? I know they love Izetta, but have they got over their fears of her father?"

Miss Willoughby laughed.

"They are so fond of Itie I believe they would have tried to forgive her even if she had fascinated Cheviot! As it is, they will not only adopt her as a daughter on the spot; but they will owe him a debt of gratitude."

"For taking pity on me?"

"For preserving you from the first strong-minded female missionary who marked you as her prey! Cuth, we two understand each other without many words; but I must say this, I should be delighted if you win Izetta. Because you have promised to wear a black coat all your days I don't see why all your surroundings should be black too; and Itie is such a darling she would make sunshine in whatever dingy place you choose to take her to!"

"Where is she?" demanded the Rev. Cuthbert, somewhat anxiously.

"In the old nursery, making scrap books. Nurse is helping her. You might tell Nurse I wanted her if you like!"

But the white shawl was not necessary. Nurse had departed to her dinner, and Itie was quite alone, not passing any longer, but apparently lost in a day-dream.

"Itie!"

He had been the only one of the family who never used the quaint abbreviation of her Spanish name. She looked up with a smile.

"I thought you always wrote your sermons on Saturday morning?"

"Hilda interrupted me. She burst into the den to demand why I wouldn't go to Benyon!"

"And you told her?"

"I gave her the reason I had told you; but, Itie, it seems you did not understand my objection!"

"No!"

Cuthbert had taken one of her pretty hands as he went on.

"I could not have borne to live at Benyon Rectory, Itie, if within a stone's throw of me at the Towers you had been ruling as Lord Caradale's wife!"

Itie began to cry.

"And you could think that—of me?"

"I thought it was all settled!"

"I would not marry Lord Caradale if he were worth his weight in gold!"

"Why not?"

"Because I do not love him!"

"Do you think you could love anyone else, Itie? I believe I am the worst match in Highshire. I am the detrimental of the family—the only one who is certain never to be rich. Do you think, Itie, you could ever learn to care for me?"

"No!"

"I was afraid of it. You are so bright and beautiful, and I—what have I to offer? Nothing but a life of honest toil in a dull, unattractive region, with only love to sweeten it."

"But love is worth all else!"

"Yet you said 'No!'"

"Of course! You asked if I could ever learn to love you; and I never, never could, for I love you already. I think I have done so ever since that moment, on the steamer, when you looked into my face and smiled."

CHAPTER IV. (AND LAST)

SIR THOMAS and his wife fully confirmed their daughter's prediction. They were so fond of Itie that they quite overlooked the very questionable status of her father, and welcomed her as Cuthbert's fiancée without a single regret.

"You see," said the Baronet, when discussing the matter with his wife and Hilda, "Cuthbert is not in the least like anyone else."

"Not in the least!"

"I never expected him to marry at all. At best I thought he would choose some plain creature in a black gown and poke bonnet. The lad is too serious by half. Now that child is just like a sunbeam; she will brighten him up!"

"And if the Clarks should come to England," said Hilda, cheerfully. "Why, the name is so common, who is to identify them with the people who kept a music-hall at Port Mary. Besides," and her voice grew serious, "Cuthbert will rather enjoy having something to bear for Izetta's sake; and you know, mother, I don't believe the parents who brought up Itie and made her what she is can be very dreadful."

"We must write to them," said Sir Thomas, "Cuthbert might hint that we are quite willing to look to the child's wedding-dress if they would rather stay in Africa."

But more surprises were in store. A letter came the next day for Miss Clark from her mother, saying that her father, being at last able to arrange his affairs, they hoped to be in England three weeks after she received those tidings. They should, of course, go direct to Uncle Charles, and they hoped their darling would meet them there. The letter had been evidently written immediately after hearing of Itie's arrival at Oakdene. There was plenty of gratitude to Lady Kate for her kindness, and even an apology for the abruptness of the note which had made her think her visitor would prove a child; but there was no hint of visiting Oakdene.

"It is clear your mother means to have nothing to do with us," said Lady Kate, a little jealously, and quite forgetting her former sentiments. "I should have thought her own cousin would stand before a mere brother-in-law."

Itie smiled.

"Uncle Charles does want them so badly. I know he has been writing despairing letters for the last five years, only father could not be spared."

"And now he will take a long holiday?"

"He will never go back to Africa again unless just for a visit. How pleased Uncle Charles will be!"

"But, my dear child!" began Sir Thomas, awkwardly, "I thought this uncle of yours had been unfortunate?"

"Most unfortunate!" agreed Izetta; "he lost his wife and children in one week of a fever. It is since that that he has been such a sad wanderer; it seemed as if he could never settle down."

"You said he was at Baden?"

"But he has come home now. I had a letter from him only yesterday. I meant to tell you about it only," and she blushed, thinking of yesterday's event, "I forgot!"

"And is he in London?"

"Yes. He wanted me very much to go up for the day and see him. I think," she added, nervously, "I might manage it. You see, the fast trains get to town in an hour and a-half. If I started early I should have quite a long day with him."

"He had much better come here."

It was impulsive Hilda who spoke; but both her parents smiled approval, and Izetta was told to write and announce her engagement to her uncle, begging him to come down to Oakdene on a two days' visit.

"We can judge so much better what Izetta's father is like when we have seen his brother," said Sir Thomas, as though apologising to his wife for the invitation.

But she only said "certainly." And when Itie received a reply that Uncle Charles would be down on Thursday, she gave orders for his reception as though he had been an old friend.

"I should like to go and meet him," said Itie, a little timidly. "Cuthbert, will you

drive me to the station, and leave me there quite alone?"

"I think I had much better take you there and let you drive home *elle-d-elle* with your uncle. I don't at all approve of your having an interview with anyone in that cold, draughty station!"

Itie twined her fingers in his buttonhole. They two were quite alone.

"I feel so frightened!"

"My darling! Do you think he will scold you for sending away an Earl, and promising yourself to a poor curate?"

"I'm not afraid of Uncle Charles."

"Of whom, then?"

"Of you!"

"Itie!"

"Promise me this," she pleaded. "However different Uncle Charles is from what you expect, you'll go on loving me just the same?"

"Even if he's a shoeblack!"

"He isn't. Don't say that. Promise, whatever he is, it shall make no difference?"

"I promise! Nothing in the world shall part us, sweetheart, I assure you!"

But Cuthbert had misgivings, and he went to claim his sister's sympathy.

"Itie is frightened to death!" he said, pleadingly, to Hilda. "I believe the old man is worse than we have any idea of! Hilda, if he puts his knife in his mouth, and drops all his 'h's', promise me to take no notice. Look just as though it was the correct thing."

"Hilda laughed.

"All right. Chey is gone, so the most critical of the family will be away."

"Gone!"

"It's my belief my first idea was partly right. He cared for Itie more than she guessed. Mother has sent him off to Meta. There's many a heart caught in the rebound, you know; and we hope in his dejection he may seek consolation from Miss Lingard, and forget her squint."

Itie had her way. Her lover left her alone at the little railway station five minutes before the train was due.

"Remember, you have promised!" were her last words to him.

But when an old gentleman, with silvery hair and noble features, alighted on the platform, she forgot all her late doings. This was Uncle Charles, the hero of her childhood. She went up to him.

"Should you have known me?" she asked, shyly; "father said you would!"

"Anywhere in the world!" replied the stranger. "You are my mother's image! But oh, Miss Itie, you have been awfully rash!"

"No!"

"Didn't you write and say you were engaged to a younger son, with only a curate's income? What will your father say?"

"Father will be delighted! For the last three years he has been haunted by the idea I should never marry at all. You see, Uncle Charles, I was frightened when people liked me out there. I always thought they wanted to marry the Governor's daughter, and your niece."

"And you think Mr. Cuthbert Willoughby is above such weakness?"

The old gentleman smiled benignly.

"Well, he comes of a good old family, so perhaps he is. And I won't deny, my child, your face might make a man disinterested."

Itie opened her eyes.

"That has nothing to do with it!"

"I should say it had a great deal."

"I mean he must be disinterested. They all believe father has failed all his life, and is now keeping a kind of low hotel and music-hall."

"Impossible!"

She explained, to the best of her power, much to her uncle's amusement.

"My dear child! Why, it must have been torture to them! The Willoughbys have the name of being the proudest family in Highshire! Do you mean that, believing this, they

received you into their home, and let their son propose to you!"

"They received me. I fancy at first—I mean before they saw me—they thought it rather rude of mother to send me, but that is only a fancy of mine. They have been kindness itself, and, when Cuthbert told them, Sir Thomas and his wife said they should be delighted to have me for a daughter."

"And what pleasing fiction do they believe about me?"

"I hardly like to tell you."

"Oh! go on! If George keeps a low music-hall, there's no believing what humble occupation they have endowed me with!"

"I never said anything about you, except that you kept wandering about, and mother was afraid to send me to you, you know," she added, half apologetically. "Mother is so anxious; she couldn't believe I should be looked after unless there was a mistress of the house."

"They doubtless take me for a kind of reprobate, unfit for the charge of a young lady!"

"I'm afraid so."

"Well, child, you seem to have deceived them pretty thoroughly?"

"I never meant to," pleaded Itie; "and I answered every one of their questions; but what could I do? They had made up a theory of their own, and they would twist all I said so as to agree with it."

"If your mother saw me keeping you here in this draughty station she would be more certain than ever I could not take care of her daughter. I see the carriage is waiting. Perhaps as we drive to Oakdene, Miss Izetta, you will enlighten me as to the next scene in the comedy."

"Oh! Uncle Charles, are you angry?"

"Not the least in the world," replied her uncle, as they drove off; "but I want to know how our worthy friends are to be enlightened?"

"Wouldn't they know by looking at you?"

"Hardly, I fear. There seems but one thing for it, my dear, you must introduce me by name to Lady Kate Willoughby."

"Must I, really?"

"I am afraid so. Come child, they can't eat you! I believe I am distantly connected with the man who married Miss Willoughby," added the kind old man; "so perhaps, after all, I can take the task of enlightenment off your shoulders."

It was five o'clock, the hour of afternoon tea, when Izetta and her uncle reached Oakdene. They were shown straight to the morning-room, where Hilda and her mother awaited them. Both ladies were charmed with the stately manners and old-world courtesy of their guests.

"Do you know," he asked presently, when poor Itie was growing so nervous she could hardly hold her teacup, "I believe I have the pleasure of being distantly connected to you?"

"Mrs. Clark is my second cousin," admitted his hostess, blandly.

"Ah! but I mean through a more recent marriage than my poor brother's. Unless I am much mistaken, my wife's nephew married your daughter!"

Lady Kate gasped. Meta the irreproachable, the faultlessly proper, did she, indeed, claim kindred with this old gentleman, who, by his niece's confession, lived nowhere?

But the mistress of Oakdene was too kind-hearted to express any doubts. She answered promptly,—

"Meta married Colonel Gray of the 11th Hussars. Would that be your nephew?"

"My wife's nephew. She has been dead these many years, but I have not quite lost sight of Gray. He and his young wife were my guests at Aspendale not long after their wedding."

"Aspendale!" Lady Kate really thought the world was coming to an end. Of course she knew her son-in-law counted kindred with the Lord of Aspendale. Did he not preface

many a sentence with "my uncle the Earl?" She was fairly at her wits' end.

"Itie said you lived nowhere," said Hilda, simply to break the awkward silence.

"No, I have four houses; but I fear I can't be said to 'live' in any of them, still Aspendale Court always seems my chief home. I expect it will be more homelike still when Itie's mother is there to do the honours."

"Mrs. Clark?" questioned Lady Kate, yet more puzzled. "But how could she do the honours of Aspendale Court?"

The Earl of Aspendale smiled.

"Because she must one day be its mistress. When Heaven calls me to join my loved ones, my brother and his wife will be Lord and Lady Aspendale. I don't know what little fictions this wilful child has concocted about our family; but I assure you, she has no very detrimental connections. Her father is Governor of Maryland, and a very important person. He resides chiefly at Port Mary, where he has the honour to represent Her Majesty. I hope in a very few days now to welcome him back to England. Four-and-twenty years ago he went out a young *attaché*, but he has now both fame and fortune. Even if he were not heir-presumptive to my Earl-dom I think his name would be known and honoured throughout the land."

"You know you promised," said Itie, a few hours later, when she and Cuthbert stood *elle-dé-tête* in the conservatory—"you know you promised you would never give me up."

"But think of the sacrifice. You are one of the richest heiresses of the day! Sometime you will be an Earl's daughter."

"Not for ages!" replied Izetta, "at least, I hope not. I want Uncle Charles to live ever so long. But even if some day I am an Earl's daughter, why should Lady Izetta Willoughby be a greater impossibility than Lady Kate?"

"Don't tempt me."

"I see. You are tired of me."

"Itie!"

"I shall go back to Port Mary," said Itie, determinedly, "and break my heart, then perhaps you'll be sorry."

"You don't understand."

"I do. You think me too wicked to be your wife just because I have a little money. I don't see why people should be wicked just because they are not poor."

She began to cry, and she carried her point. Cuthbert submitted to his good fortune, and agreed to be as faithful to the heiress as he had vowed to be to poor little Itie.

As to his family, their delight was too genuine to be displeasing. They would have welcomed Itie poor and obscure, her only title of honour that she was the Willoughbys' cousin; but they could not but be glad Cuthbert should wed one so richly dowered as the ex-Governor's heiress, a girl who some day must be in her own right Countess of Aspendale.

The only person who ever regretted the arrangement was Meta Gray. She was vastly gracious to Miss Clark when she met her, but she always declared such a prize should have been reserved for Cheviot. As to Cuthbert's wedding an heiress it was most unnecessary; and the long history Hilda took so much trouble to explain to her she simply would not listen to, but poopooed with the calm reproof,—

"Nonsense, Hilda, I don't believe it. No person in their senses, much less a whole family, could ever have made such a strange mistake."

[THE END.]

A WISE KING.—The Prince Regent of Bavaria wisely insisted that each of his children be taught a manual trade. The future king, Prince Rupert, chose that of a turner, and works every day in his shop. The young Prince Franz is a painter, and Prince Charles a gardener.

WHAT A BOUQUET DID.

PARIS boulevard flower-dealers have wonderful taste for arranging flowers. There is one of them, Madame Lion, whose reputation is European ever since an incident with which she happened to be connected got into the newspapers. One of the secretaries of the French Embassy at St. Petersburg fell in love with one of the ladies of honour to the Empress. Unluckily for the young diplomatist, she was already engaged to be married to a very wealthy and titled Muscovite; but she could not help showing her preference for the noble Frenchman. Thereupon the Russian made such a scene that the lady went to the Empress for protection. "Try to induce her majesty to accord your hand to whichever of us two shall produce the most beautiful bouquet," said the secretary. She promised she would do so. The Empress loved her very much indeed, and readily yielded to an arrangement which promised to be pleasant in any event. She sent for the young lady's father, who laughingly consented to all that was going on. Then the Russian gentleman was communicated with, and, when he was informed that mademoiselle's hand was for him who gave her the most magnificent bouquet on that day fortnight—the Empress herself to be the judge—he believed he would become her husband and none other. But, confident in his great fortune and his own good taste, this Russian let the days pass, supposing all the time that his money could buy what he wanted at the last moment. The day arrived when the love-gage was to be decided. The Russian nobleman advanced and presented an enormous bouquet. It was indeed beautiful, being made up of the rarest flowers that could be found in all Russia, and had cost something like eight thousand roubles. At the sight of it the young lady nearly fainted. Surely it was impossible for her dear little diplomatist ever to excel such magnificence! With a mocking smile on his lips the count stepped forward, holding in his hand two gilded boxes. In polite language he said that one of the boxes contained a bouquet for the lady he loved; the other held a few flowers which he humbly begged that the Empress would deign to accept. Then he handed the two ladies each her bouquet, and immediately all those present saw that he had won; for never before was there such a lovely combination of colour and perfume as in those which he himself had brought from Paris. The instant that the gage had been thrown down he applied for leave of absence. It took nearly two days to get it, and then he started for Paris. Arriving there, he rode straight to a famous flower shop, and told the proprietress what he wanted. That night, at eight o'clock, he was on his way back to Russia; and in the large basket, which he looked after carefully day and night, were the exquisite flowers. Such a bouquet was never seen in the Russian capital; and the Empress, without delay, awarded the count the young lady's hand. They were married, and are now living in Vienna, to which embassy he was afterwards promoted.

PERFECT manners are a part of the character as much as patience and honesty, and their beneficence is displayed not only towards the just but unjust; in fact, they seem to belong to the texture of the weaver's mind, to be a reflection of the spirit of justice which would give everybody his due, withholding no civility or kindness.

EVERY breach of faith, every broken promise, every mean advantage taken, however small and trifling each may appear, helps to build up the dishonesty which at some time, and by some one, wrecks the happiness of multitudes and drags down the sinning one to degradation and ruin. The honour of the country and the integrity of the nation are in the hands of every citizen; each is responsible for his share in making or in marring them.

THE MANUFACTURE OF RIBBONS.—It is known that the manufacture of ribbons was fairly established in St. Etienne, France, in the eleventh century, and that the place remains to this day the principal centre of the industry. During the persecution of the Huguenots in that country, many of the St. Etienne operatives went out to Basle, Switzerland, and established the industry there, where it became second only to St. Etienne. The third most important centre was Coventry, England, but Crefeld and Vienna are also large producing centres. To-day there are manufactured in the United States quite as many ribbons as are made in St. Etienne. The product of Switzerland consists mainly of plain styles; that of France largely of fine and fancy millinery goods; that of Crefeld mainly of black silk and black velvet ribbons, the latter a speciality; that of England very largely of plain goods; while the United States tries everything with much success, though dependent chiefly upon Europe for the lead in styles. It is a curious fact that for five hundred years ribbons were worn mostly by men rather than by women, especially during the long period of effeminacy in the male attire. In the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries their use in England was restricted to the royalty and gentry by statute. In the time of Charles II. and James II. the whole attire was covered with ribbons. A fop in those days was described as "wearing more than would stock half-a-dozen shops or twenty country peddlers." It is another curious fact that in the manufacture of ribbons the self-acting loom was in use one hundred years before Cartwright's invention, and that in more recent times little new has been added in that branch of the silk industry.

A GOOD WATCH DOG.—A well-bred, rough-haired terrier weighing about twelve pounds, makes a capital house protector. He is likely to be full of intelligence, and will not give an alarm without cause. If he hears a noise, he will thoroughly investigate it before he barks. No passing footsteps, no wind-rattled shutters, in fact, nothing but an attempt to get feloniously into the house, will induce him to arouse the inmates. If his suspicions are awakened, he will go quietly from door to door, and from window to window, sniffing softly at each, and ascertain the exact state of affairs. Then, if his voice is heard, it is time for everybody to get up. The robbers will always certainly run away when they hear him, but if there is any unpleasantness, the dog may be trusted to do his share of the work, though he could not undertake it alone. Such a dog should never be allowed to fraternise with strangers or to take food from unaccustomed hands, though probably his disposition will not lead him to do so, but poisoned meat surreptitiously thrown over the fence is a great aid to burglars.

SELF-MADE.—though there is really no creature of that sort in creation—is a title which in current use has come to be received as a kind of indisputable challenge to admiration, a proof of intellectual nobility and fitness for high office. Great respect is doubtless due to the energy of any man who makes the most of his gifts or his opportunity. Such men may here and there rise to the peerage of the world. But the self-made man is badly made who is not ready to confess that other men might have made him better than he has made himself, and especially that institutions which gather and treasure up the wisdom of the past and are complicated instruments perfected by ages are likely to educate better than an individual mind, however vigorous, or an individual will, however resolute, or a personal aspiration left to itself, however persistent. Who would not rather have as his ruler, his doctor, his preacher, his attorney, or his judge, the pupil of the best that the world has thought and learned than the pupil of a master who is master and pupil at the same time, and who therefore at any given moment has an uneducated mind for his educator?

FACETIE.

Why does a policeman seize his man by the collar? For collarateral security.

The kind of book which, as to size, is most in favour with tipplers is the quart o.

Young people always like to have a "Lovers' Lane" intersected with plenty of bridal paths.

The new moon reminds one of a giddy girl, because she is too young to show much reflection.

What would this world be without a woman?—A perfect blank—like a sheet of paper—not even ruled.

MISSED HER CALLING.—Every time a lady physician calls on a gentleman patient it is unmistakably evident that she's Mr. calling.

A DENTIST'S LITTLE JOKE.—"You see, my dear fellow, that a person who is considered landless has sometimes two or three achers in his month."

"ANGELINE," said Dorothea, as she abstractedly fingered the keys of the piano, "what is your favourite air?" "The million heir," Angeline abstractedly replied.

When Jones came in the room unexpectedly, Mrs. Jones gave a scream and exclaimed: "You frightened me half to death." "Did I?" was the unfeeling reply. "Suppose I try it over again."

LITTLE GIRL (to a playmate): "We had a wooden wedding at our house last night." The Playmate: "Well, we had a wooden wedding at our house last week. My sister wouldn't marry old Mr. Dorkins."

"My dear boy," said a fond father to his son, "never neglect your work. Work acts like medicine." "Then," exclaimed the son, who had been dosed with drugs, "I don't want any of it; I hate medicine!"

"John," said a wife to her husband, as she looked up from her morning paper, "what is a coastwise steamer?" "A coastwise steamer, my dear? Why, a coastwise steamer is one that knows how to keep off the rocks along the coast."

IT OUGHT TO BE POPULAR.—A new comic song is called "The Tomcat is a Funny Old Bird." It is sung to the accompaniment of a shot gun. If the gun misses the cat and kills the singer, there is no complaint. Everybody is satisfied.

Two young ladies and an Irish gentleman were conversing on age, when one of them put the home question: "Which of us do you think is the elder, Mr. G—?" "Sure," replied the gallant Hibernian, "you both look younger than each other."

IN VINO VERITAS.—Two men, who had taken more than was good for them, were spending an hour over a social glass. "Smith, old man," said one to the other, grasping him by the hand and shaking it warmly, "I've known you for the last twenty years, and we have been very good friends, but I've never liked you."

A CHILD'S WISDOM.—Five-year-old Lucy was much displeased when her mother drowned a couple of kittens. A few days subsequently she was taken into her mother's chamber to see a brand-new brother. "Mamma," said the little girl, with a look of disgust at the noisy new-comer, "don't you think it would have been better to have saved one of the kitties and drowned the baby? The kitty didn't cry all the time."

PRACTISING FOR THE WEDDING.—"What's the reason Charlotte doesn't come to school?" asked the teacher of a little tow-headed boy on Monday morning. "I dunno," replied the boy, as he nearly ruined his hat by pulling it instead of lifting it off his head, "but I expect it's on account of her bean." "Is she going to get married?" "Well, she acts like it. I saw her pull her bean's hair last night, and that's the way ma treats pa. I suppose Ole is practising for the wedding."

FAME.—A man may acquire fame by writing an epic that will last for ever; but when he dies, his funeral will not be half so large and imposing as that of the slogger who knocks another ruffian out in three rounds for the championship.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER, ETC.—A woman's journal says that "some of the best men in this country are journalists." And it might have added that some of the best women in this country are the wives of journalists. Good men and good women come high, but we must have them.

HOTEL WAITER: "You are late for lunch, sir." Eminent Physician: "Yes. I had to finish my magazine article on 'The Laws of Health,' so as to get it into the next post. What have you to-day?" "Hot rolls, plum-pudding, apple-dumplings, mince-pie and fruit-cake." "Bring 'em all."

IGNORANCE IS BLINTE.—A woman whose husband left her because of her ignorance of culinary matters, is now engaged in writing a "Family Cook Book." It will, no doubt, be a very valuable work, for her husband declares that she cooked but three kinds of food for dinner three months in succession.

"Well, there's no use talking," said Joak to Bixby, as they came out of the barber-shop. "I'll have to change barbers." "Why?" asked Bixby. "Is he too slow?" "Slow," exclaimed Joak. "Slow? Well, I should think so! Why, he shaved me on one side, and before he got the other side finished, the hair had sprouted out again."

WIFE: "John, I suppose you have some money saved up, haven't you?" John: "Not a fraction." "Why, John! It's a year since you stopped drinking, and you have worked like a slave every day since." "That's true." "Where is your money, then?" "The money I saved by swearing off I had to lend to old friends who didn't swear off."

"There goes a handsome woman," said Wigwag to McPelter. "Do you know her?" "That's Miss Reberche, and I may, hardly say that I know her. However, she called 'Hello!' to me, very familiarly, the other day." "You don't say so? And yet she didn't seem to recognize you just now." "Oh, no! I didn't expect her to. She called to me through the telephone!"

WIFE (returned from church, to her husband who had stayed at home): "You should have heard Dr. Doe's sermon this morning, my dear. I don't know when anything has made such a profound impression upon me. I think it will make a better woman of me as long as I live." Husband: "Did you walk home?" Wife: "No, I took a tramcar; and do you know, John, the conductor never asked me for my fare, and so I saved two pence! Wasn't I lucky?"

"Why is it that the attendants in telephone offices are all women?" Mrs. Brown asked her husband. "Well," answered Mr. Brown, "the managers of the telephone offices were aware that no class of attendants work so faithfully as those who are in love with their labour; and they knew that women would be fond of the work in telephone offices." "What is the work in a telephone office?" Mrs. Brown further inquired. "Talking," answered Mr. Brown; and the conversation came to an end.

A RIDICULOUS PLEA.—A man had to pay five pounds for kissing a strange woman at a railway station. He pleaded in extenuation of his crime that he thought the woman was his wife, but the judge was a married man himself, and said such an excuse was too diaphanous. If the defendant had said that he thought the woman was some other man's wife, his honour would have believed him, and let him off with a fine of a shilling, which would have satisfied outraged justice, and the man would have got the worth of his money, and more; too, especially if he threw his arms around the neck of the strange woman when he imprinted the kiss.

FALSE WITNESS.—The children at a Sunday school not long since, being asked among other questions what bearing false witness against one's neighbour means, a pert little girl replied: "It is when nobody hain't done nothing, and somebody goes and tells."

REPLY TO AN "ANXIOUS INQUIRER"—"Broughne" writes: "Suppose I invite a young lady to accompany me to the circus, and upon arriving at the ticket wagon find that I have left my purse at home in the left hand pocket of my linen ulster and haven't sufficient money with me to purchase tickets? What would be the best course to pursue under such circumstances?" Well, it must be admitted that Broughne would be placed in a very embarrassing position, and would almost be justified in pursuing a bloated monopolist and relieving him of his well-filled purse. But a more honourable plan—and one that is frequently adopted under similar circumstances—would be to take his young lady companion to the rear of the tent, and, when a good opportunity offered, quietly hoist the canvas, and both crawl under.

SHE ENJOYED THE CURTAIN.—A lady has a girl in her employ fresh from some region far removed from the theatre. Thinking to give the girl a good treat, and knowing that she had never seen a theatre, the lady purchased a ticket for a play in a large London house. The girl went, but returned before nine o'clock. "What is the matter? Did you not like it?" asked the mistress. "Oh, I liked it ever so much; it's a fine painting." "But," inquired her mistress, "Why have you returned so soon? Surely you didn't see it all?" "Yes, ma'am, I did. I went in and sat down and looked at the large picture hanging up in front. People kept coming in, and pretty soon there was quite a crowd all looking at the picture. Then they took it away, and some men and women went to talking, up there where it had been, about something that didn't concern me, so I got up and came home. But I enjoyed the picture."

AN IMPROVED ALMANACK WANTED.—Someone wants the months divided, so that February will have thirty days. The almanack makers should act on this suggestion—and while they are about it, let 'em strike out March altogether and put that many more days in golden October. March is the meanest month ever invented, and no one would mourn its elimination. And a few other changes in the almanack are desirable. Let Easter Sunday occur about the 15th of May, when it isn't so chilly, and make Christmas eventuate about the last of September, when a man can go out without feeling as if he was rubbing against the North Pole. Also, scatter a few comets throughout the year for the benefit of young people who are in the courting period. Comets afford lovers a good excuse for remaining out after the old folks are in bed. If these suggestions are acted upon, a new boom will be given to the almanack industry.

THE BOY AND THE BUMBLE BEE.—A naturalist says that if there were no bumble bees, farmers could not raise clover seed. This may be true. And if there were no such insects the small boy would less frequently raise a series of frightful howls. The small boy will moan about a fancied blister on the hand when his mother asks him to saw an armful of wood, but he will go for a bumble bee's nest with a determination to conquer or die. And he always conquers. A particularly ferocious bee may chase him seventeen times around a ten acre field, and insert its javelin two or three times under the lad's shirt collar and leave its autograph on his cheek and bung up his left eye, but the boy doesn't surrender. He howls and returns to the combat and finally kills the last bee in the nest, and makes a grab and secures a comb full of young bees, wax, and four drops of honey. The boy is excited, and fearing a few bees that have been out visiting may unexpectedly return, he swallows some of the embryo bees and the honey in great haste and with apparent relish.

SOCIETY.

The Empress of Austria is still suffering much from rheumatism; the attack, though not absolutely dangerous, prevents Her Majesty from taking part in any of the Court Balls and State receptions this winter. The doctors have ordered her to take lessons in fencing, in order to reduce the stiffness of the muscles; and as soon as the season is a little advanced, Her Majesty is to make a visit to Aix-les-Bains, and take a course of the baths there.

VIENNA has been wonderfully gay. The Polish Ball was attended by the Crown Prince and Princess of Austria. The Princess looked splendid in a robe of grenat velvet and superb jewellery; while the Archduchess Marie Theres wore a charming costume of pale blue, and the Duchess of Coburg was dressed in rose colour, trimmed with the darker shade of blue called *renard*. Innumerable distinguished Poles with unpronounceable names attended the ball, which was kept up with great spirit. The Archduke Rudolph, while his fair consort amused herself with dancing, walked about the rooms, and conversed with many persons of note, specially singling out the French Ambassador, M. Dulaie, for a long chat during the evening. Two days later a large *societe dansante* was given at the English Embassy, which was also graced by the Crown Prince and Princess, and several other members of the Imperial House. The British Ambassador and Lady Paget did the honours in capital style.

THERE are rumours, says *Modern Society*, of appeals for grants for the maintenance of the daughters of the Prince of Wales, and though it may seem ungallant to refuse a petition when there is a lady in the case, the hard fact remains that Royalty already costs the nation nearly a million sterling per annum; and this being the case, it is but reasonable that the younger branches of the family should be provided for by those who now handle a tolerably weighty purse. Most certainly the representatives of the people will not be doing their duty if they permit any more Royal dowries or annuities to be smuggled through the House of Commons. Moreover, if the members of the Royal family conceive that they have a right to bleed the nation whenever it pleases them, they may be told that in like manner it has been announced that there is no such thing as the Queen's bounty, so also there is no such thing as the People's bounty.

PRINCE ALBERT VICTOR appears to be having a rare time in Yorkshire, and wherever he goes there are always plenty of ladies. He left Birdsall recently for his "diggings," and at the station the company present to see him off were principally ladies. He was so bashful that he was obliged to seek refuge in the stationmaster's house. Poor dear, he wants his pa to give him a few lessons, he dees. His Royal Highness does very little duty as a soldier; by-the-bye, he told the Lord Mayor of York that he was a soldier, so he must be one; but he apparently does more duty with the ladies than with his troop.

Mr. and Mrs. Tower gave a ball recently at Wend Hall, Brentwood, to celebrate the fifth anniversary of their wedding. The north drawing-room, hung with old tapestry, served as the reception room, the floral decorations consisting of ferns and yellow tulips. The large saloon was converted into a dancing-room, and was illuminated by two hundred candles in brackets and springing from candelabra. The dining-room served as the supper-room. The table decorations consisted of maidenhair fern, relieved with pink tulips and Cocos weddelliana, a small palm rising from the centre of each design. Mr. Tower's room, adorned with stage heads and sketches by Landseer, was utilised as an oyster buffet. The music was supplied by the Blue Hungarian band.

STATISTICS.

It is estimated that pin factories in New England turn out 10 800 000 000 pins yearly, and that other factories in the States bring the number up to 18 000 000 000.

LONDON has 600 places of amusement, of which more than 450 are music halls. The theatres are about fifty. Direct employment is given to about 150,000 people, besides indirect employment to a host of tradesmen and their workpeople.

ACCORDING to a recent paper by Dr. John Murray of the *Challenger* expedition, the mean height of the land of the globe is 2 230 feet above the sea level, and the mean depth of the ocean is 12 480 feet, or 2 080 fathoms. If the dry land of the globe were reduced to the sea level by being removed to and piled up in the shallower waters of the ocean, then its extent would be about 80 000 000 square miles, and the rest of the surface of the earth would be covered by an ocean extending to 113 000 000 square miles. Should the whole of the solid land be reduced to one level under the ocean, then the surface of the earth would be covered by an ocean with a uniform depth of about two miles.

GEMS.

LOVE when forced must soon become mortal hatred.

UNLESS the habit leads to happiness, the best habit is to contract none.

ALL the rarest hues of human life take radiance and are rainbowed out in tears.

ONE seldom speaks of the virtue which one has; but much oftener of that which fails us.

DO not anticipate trouble and worry about what may never happen. Keep in the sunlight.

THE scholar without good breeding is a pedant; the philosopher a cynic; the soldier a brute, and every man disagreeable.

WHEN weariness comes, take a breathing-time. Of one thing be sure—to-day's work well done will prepare you for to-morrow.

GREATNESS is the aggregation of minuteness; nor can its sublimity be felt truthfully by any mind unaccustomed to the affectionate watching of what is least.

THE woman must not belong to herself; she is bound to alien destinies. But she performs her part best who can take freely, of her own choice, the alien to her heart, can bear and foster it with sincerity and love.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

JOCKEY CLUB PERFUME.—To make Jockey Club extract, mix one pint of extract of rose, one of tuberose, half a pint of extract of cassia, four ounces of jasmine, and three ounces of tincture of civet. Filter the mixture.

LIQUID STOVE POLISH.—To make a liquid stove polish, mix weak alum water with British lustre—two teaspoonsfuls of the latter with a gill of the former. Wet a brush with it and apply, and then take a dry brush and rub the stove until perfectly dry.

BOOT POLISH.—A French polish for boots, and shoes is thus made:—Logwood chips, half a pound, glue, a quarter of a pound, indigo, pounded very fine, a quarter of an ounce. Boil these ingredients in two pints of vinegar, and one of water, during ten minutes after ebullition, then strain the liquid. When cold it is ready for use. The dust must be cleaned from the boots and shoes, and when they are quite dry, apply the polish with a sponge.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE good man who is reflective will find that, as his views on various points change with increasing knowledge, his standard of action changes also. Some things which he once regarded with the utmost leniency he now looks upon as grave wrongs, and as fast as he discovers the best path in any direction it becomes for him the path of duty.

SUSPENSION of judgment at certain times should be sedulously cultivated. When we remember how frequently complex conditions are involved, and how difficult it is to understand and appreciate those conditions and to accord to each its proportionate value, we may well pause and reflect before committing ourselves to judgments which may prove to be wrong.

THERE are those who would scorn to commit theft in the common acceptance of the word who yet do not hesitate to evade paying their just dues to the city or state whose privileges they enjoy. Yet the latter is only theft on a broader scale. The money which they thus dishonestly retain must be paid by others, and the injury done is no less certain because they cannot trace it.

THE EYELIDS.—A profound observer says that the way to judge an individual's temper is to watch the eyelids. One with a fiery temper will move eyelids with a snap. Another who is easy-going and hard to arouse, moves the eyelids languidly. One with a quick brain and temper, furious when aroused, just winks steadily, but neither quickly nor slowly until engaged in interesting conversation.

A STUDIOUS PORTER.—The Mexicans are great patrons of little books and pamphlets, which are carried around by hawkers and are sold in all parts of the country. An American traveller once observed a stupid-looking porter of one of the most backward of Mexican cities lying on a bench and poring over a well-thumbed book hour after hour. Looking to see what was the book in which the boy had become so absorbed, he found that it was a translation of Robert Browning.

DAY after day our span is shortened and our powers are lessened; but those who desire to do good have always time wherein to effect it, and love and virtue do not perish. Example and the good we do in life are our truest immortality. For one life that we have redeemed by our own, one impetus that we have given to the ball of progress, we may well give years of personal sorrow; and no time is lost that shows a brave front to pain, that bears disappointment with equanimity, or that does one hour's breadth of actual good.

REVERSAL OF APPAREL.—In Muscat the men all wear skirts and the women wear the breeches, though this principle of reversal does not extend beyond the apparel. Muscat's principal industry is the export of dates, the finest of which come to America. In return we send the people of Muscat cotton sheeting. The dates as they are packed down for export are packed down with American cider presses. India takes large quantities of the inferior quality of dates, and the membranous parts of sharks' fins are dried and sent to China.

TIME.—People who are avowedly tired of life are generally intensely selfish. They live for themselves—exist solely to gratify their sensual selves. They are an animated frivolity, an empty and irritating gigue, capable of little more than vacuous mirth, of loving blue china, or going to the theatre, or ceaselessly spinning round on the whirligig of fashion. Their own essential littleness is the cause of their weariness; their frivolity is the mother of their exhaustion. "Man," said the ancient, "is the measure of the universe;" therefore the less the man, the less his universe—the greater the man, the greater his universe.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

E. C.—1. Jan. 10, 1868, came on Friday. 2. About 120 pounds.

A. A. T.—The strength of a horse is equivalent to that of five men.

E. N.—1. The usual spelling is *Eldelweis*. 2. Either address will answer.

F. R. H. G.—Unless money has been paid no such order can be obtained.

COCOA.—We cannot give any opinion as to the stability of a firm or company.

ITV LEAVER.—She would obtain the money if she could be properly identified.

H. V.—The largest diamond-cutting establishment in the world is at Amsterdam.

"PARRY."—You did not rather hastily, but you can do nothing now but wait patiently.

E. W.—Pig Iron is so called because it is moulded in little bars or pigs as it runs from the furnace.

WILLIE'S DARLING.—1. Join a class for callisthenics. You have plenty of time to develop. 2. Very poor.

LENA.—In the year 1869, Easter Sunday fell on March 23. This year the date of its occurrence will be April 1.

A SOMERSET LASSIE.—1. It is a matter of taste. 2. The Rectory. 3. Nothing could prevent it, but you should use the tweezers persistently. 4. Quite optional.

R. S. C.—It is not known when oysters were first eaten, but it seems to be certain that they have been used as food by all people from the most ancient times.

MILK MAID.—1. A brown silk dress would be very suitable. The price would depend entirely upon quality and style. 2. Dark frock coat and light waistcoat and trousers.

U. V. W.—Make personal inquiry for employment, as we are not in a position to inform you where it can be obtained. Doubtless some of your friends will be happy to impart such information.

L. W. R.—Etiquette requires that a gentleman must always precede a lady up a flight of stairs, and allow her to precede him in going down. This rule is not strictly observed by married or elderly couples.

D. N.—Let your hair remain as it is, and do not ruin it by the use of bleaching compounds. They all contain poisonous elements, which, as a natural consequence, sap the life of the hair and injure the scalp.

C. W.—A remedy for itching feet from frost-bites is hydrochloric acid, one ounce; rain water, seven ounces. Wash the feet with it two or three times a day, or wet the socks with the preparation until relieved.

R. H.—1. When a person expresses thankfulness for a kindness in the words "I am very much obliged," the reply should be, "You are very welcome." 2. Your penmanship is excellent, but the spelling is faulty.

R. D. D.—The process of manufacturing "Russian sheet iron," as it is called in trade circles, is not a secret, but as more than the usual amount of space would be required in which to describe it, we are compelled to refer you to a book devoted to iron-making.

F. N.—It is the lady's privilege to extend an invitation to her male friends to call on her. She is thus saved from being placed in the embarrassing position of either refusing their requests to visit her, or having to entertain company for which she has no special liking.

C. W. S.—Candace was an Ethiopian queen. In the Acts of the Apostles mention is made of Candace, Queen of the Ethiopians, that is, of Upper Nubia, between the Nile and the Atbara. Candace was probably not an individual name, but the title of a succession of female sovereigns.

R. R. J.—The name of the eldest son of the Prince of Wales of England is Albert Victor Christian Edward. He was born on Jan. 8, 1864. The name of the second son is George; born on Jan. 8, 1865. The third son, Alexander, who was born on April 6, 1871, died on April 7 of the same year.

F. F.—We are utterly unable to give a satisfactory solution of your conundrum "Why does the one I admire so much turn from me?" Perhaps he is of such a stolid, obtuse temperament as to be unable to recognise the charms of the gentle sex, or looks upon some other vision of loveliness with kinder eyes.

E. D.—It is not at all likely that a parent would require his son, who is working in a distant city, to surrender the entire salary earned by him, but he could compel him to contribute to his support until the boy had reached his majority. Of course, much depends upon the kind of a father he may happen to be.

C. I. B.—We cannot recommend anything better than the novels of Sir Walter Scott, George Eliot, and Dinah Maria Mulock. These will give you food for thought and conversation, and revive your interest in life and history. When you have recovered your health you will be glad that you enlivened your days of invalidism with such delightful reading.

N. N.—The marriage is perfectly legal and the change of name makes no difference. Since your father has used the name for so many years it is better not to make any change. He is known to everybody, and his family is known by his assumed name. It would excite remark and cause unjust suspicion to raise any question now about the name. Your father can have the change of name legalized.

A. N. F.—There is a diversity of opinion among physicians as to the use of calomel or mercury. We would not recommend it, but many physicians claim that its effects, especially upon the liver, are beneficial, and that properly administered it is harmless. In all cases of sickness it is better to be governed by the advice of a physician in whom you repose confidence.

W. F.—If you have stated the case accurately, the young lady to whom you refer has been acting in an unbecoming manner. But as your feelings are enlisted in behalf of the young man, and as you have doubtless received all your information as to the matter from him, the probability is that you have not done the young lady justice in your statement of the case.

B. D.—1. Shaving will render the beard stronger, and also promote its growth, but we know of no other means of hastening its appearance. 2. If your means will allow of the indulgence in the luxury of a wife, make haste to marry "the loveliest girl in the world," as you so flatteringly describe your ladylove. Otherwise, wait until a sufficient capital has been accumulated to warrant the venture. 3. The writing is too large and irregular.

P. P.—We do not agree with you. Your objection to convictions on circumstantial evidence are not sound. It is true that there are instances on record in which men have been wrongfully condemned and punished on circumstantial evidence. But, on the other hand, there have been many instances in which the lives of men have been sworn away by the testimony of perjured wretches who pretended to have been eye-witnesses of the crimes charged in the indictments. And everybody familiar with such matters knows that it is easier to procure the testimony of perjured witnesses than it is to deceive and mislead courts and juries with unsound circumstantial evidence; or, in other words, that it is safer to rely on the evidence of a series of occurrences for which the reason of man can find but one solution, than upon the oaths of two or three men who may possibly have an interest in the conviction and death of the prisoner on trial.

THE ROBIN'S RAIN SONG.

There are silver pools in the garden walks,
And diamond drops in the bower;
And the young green leaves and the withered stalks
Are drenched in the crystal shower.
At the purple plumage of the lilac spray
I gaze through a jewelled pane,
Where a robin sitteth the livelong day,
And singeth a song of rain.

To the farmer driving his oxen by
He sings of the harvest yield,
Of the corn, and the wheat, and the haystack high,
And the cows in the daisied field;
But to me, who gaze through a mist of tears,
A sad and a sweet refrain,
Set to the tune of the bygone years,
Is the robin's song in the rain.

For the gate is opened by the lilac bush,
And a fair little maid comes through,
And stops to hear, in the twilight hush,
Just as I used to do.
I can see the gleam of the golden hair,
And the neck in its slender chain,
And the dainty skirt that she lifts with care,
From the long grass wet with the rain.

The gate long since to the flame was fed,
And the lilac tree has grown,
And the little maid is dead, as dead,
As if under a churchyard stone.
For here in her place is a woman old,
Who thinks that she sees again
The rosy face and the locks of gold,
When the robin sings in the rain.

M. I.

E. E.—It stands to reason that a stranger is not the proper person to consult regarding the settlement of family troubles. Such matters must be arranged by the persons directly interested. Failing in this, it may be necessary to invoke the law to bring about a satisfactory solution of the difficulty. We, on this account, never advise any special course of action or express an opinion as to the merits or demerits of such cases.

JOSIE.—1. Casual acquaintances made in a ball-room or dancing-school do not extend beyond the special occasion on which they are formed. The gentleman would have no right to lift his hat or converse with the lady who had on a former occasion honoured him by becoming his partner in a dance. 2. You possess more than the ordinary share of personal beauty. 3. The penmanship and composition both indicate careful scholastic training.

B. B.—Religion and politics are two subjects which cannot be discussed in a column devoted to giving information to the readers of this paper. Therefore it is useless to refer disputes concerning either subject to us, as we cannot act as arbitrators, it being our invariable rule to decline their discussion. There are many persons in your circle of acquaintances to whom the questions asked may be referred, and from whom you will be sure to obtain a satisfactory answer.

C. C. T.—An excellent remedy for chilblains is made by mixing together one fluid ounce of rectified oil of turpentine, fifteen drops of sulphuric acid, and two ounces of olive oil. This rubbed gently on the chilblains twice a day is generally very effective. For broken chilblains mix together four fluid ounces of collodion, one and a half fluid ounces of Venetian turpentine and one fluid ounce of castor oil, and rub gently on the chilblains.

M. L.—The use of amulets or charms is no longer common, although some persons still wear them. In ancient times they were generally worn. The caul is still worn as an amulet by seafaring people, who believe that a child's caul will preserve a ship and crew from being lost at sea. Sailors, however, are very superstitious and imaginative owing to their peculiar life and surroundings. We advise you to put no trust in any charm. Apply to a good physician.

Jov.—Grey hairs can never be restored to their original hue, even though dyes claiming to produce such a result be used with the most persistent regularity. Keep the scalp clear of dandruff, avoid excitement, and lead an easy, comfortable life, putting all cares in the background, and take life as you find it. Severe headaches and neuralgia often cause the hair to lose its colour; if you are afflicted with either of these troubles, endeavour to overcome them with the help of your family physician.

B. C.—The shaking that you complain of is probably the result of nervousness and timidity, and does not require medical treatment so much as the support and encouragement of your friends when in company. Try to be easy and composed and to think of others and not of yourself. Do not be worried about the impression you are making, but simply try to be unconscious and agreeable. Often a cup of tea, especially hot tea, will help you before going into company.

E. G.—The horse-hoe should be placed with the toe upwards. There is no significance in these old superstitions. It makes no difference whatever whether you pluck a four leaved clover or not; the luck is supposed to be indicated by finding it. History is the best reading for the young. Read history and travels. We do not know of any places where free instruction in music is given except in the public schools. Your writing indicates a cheerful and vivacious temperament.

L. B.—South American States are not as favourable for business as the United States. A young man with a little capital can do better in any thriving western town or city where he understands the people and the language than he can in a strange country where he has to deal with people who are foreign to him in their language, race, manners, customs and tastes. Unless you know a little Spanish and have favourable offers, we would not advise you to go to South America.

C. S.—Fur for winter wear is in good taste. It does not matter whether you are in mourning or not, as fur is a protection against the cold weather, and almost absolutely required in northern climates, and delicate women who possess fur-lined garments or sealskin overgarments should wear them. Inexpensive furs are in perfect taste. Dark sealskin is preferable. A jacket of sealskin is one of the most useful as it is one of the most becoming over-garment that a young woman can wear in cold weather.

R. R. B.—We do not agree with our correspondent's "learned and popular" physician. Were pork poisonous, tens of thousands of dead, slain by its venom, would be (to speak metaphorically) holding up their skeleton fingers in warning against it. There may be too much pork for health eaten by some people, as it is said that "too much pork for a shilling" is sometimes dealt out by careless butchers; but we think that our correspondent may enjoy his bacon and eggs without fear of the coroner.

C. W.—There is much to be overlooked and forgiven in every relation of life, and in none is there greater reason to be charitable, tolerant, and forgiving than in the marriage relation. If your husband is neglectful, cross, and dissipated, your lot is hard to bear; but it is best for you to bear it and trust to the influence of home, family, and religion than to take any desperate step or to seek a separation. So long as there is hope and your life is endurable try to win your husband to better ways. Your little children will help you to reclaim their father.

M. M. G.—There is nothing which you can use that will expedite the growth of your beard. You will have to trust entirely to nature for the development of that masculine adornment. Some young men have heavy beards before they arrive at the age of twenty-one, and some men never have much beard. Whether a man is fit for matrimony or not at the age of twenty-one depends on his character and his intelligence, and also, to some degree, on his circumstances. If he has any doubt on the subject himself, he should give single blessedness the benefit of the doubt, and wait till he see his way clear before he gets married.

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